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DEC. 8, 2008

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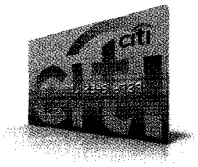

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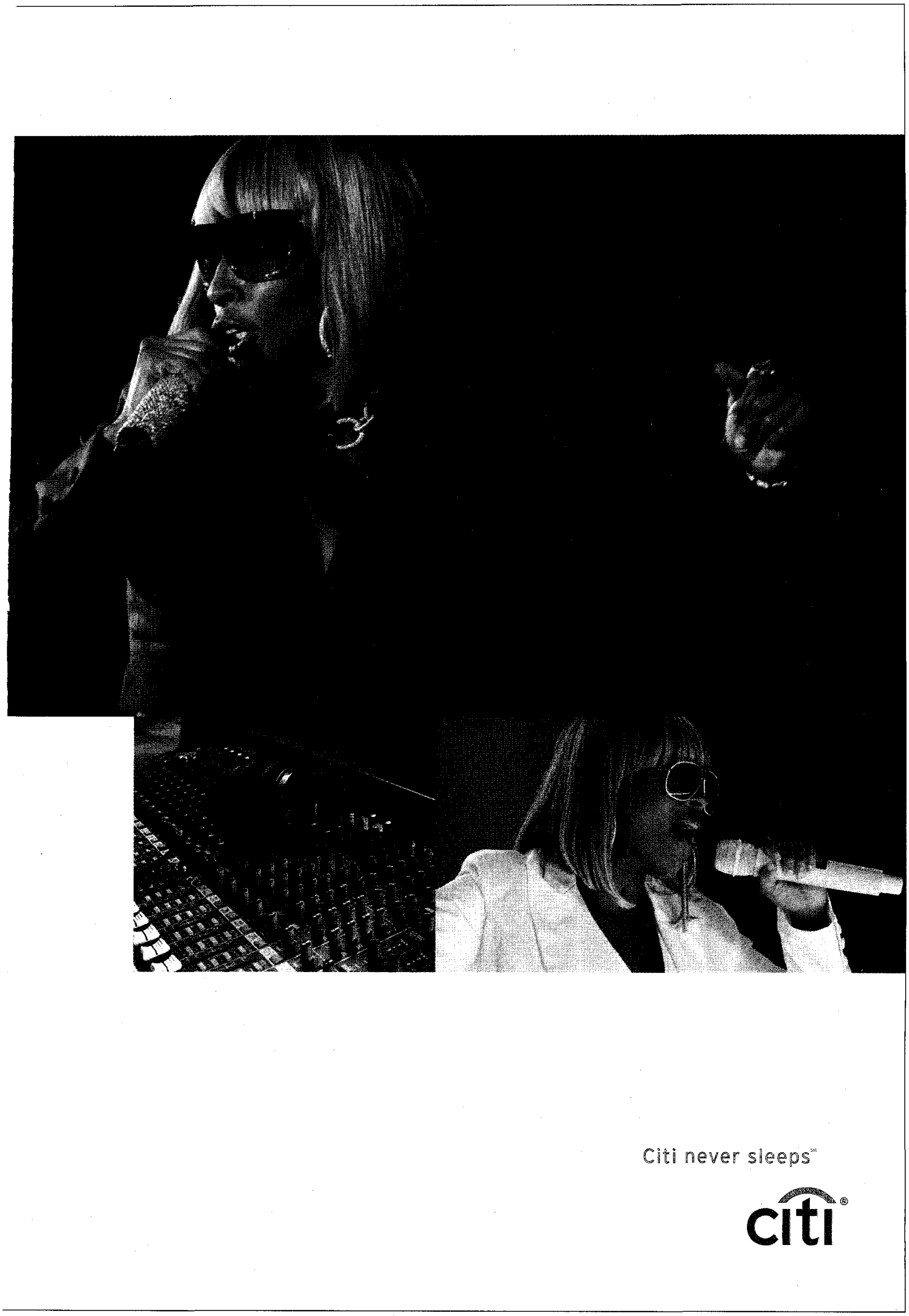
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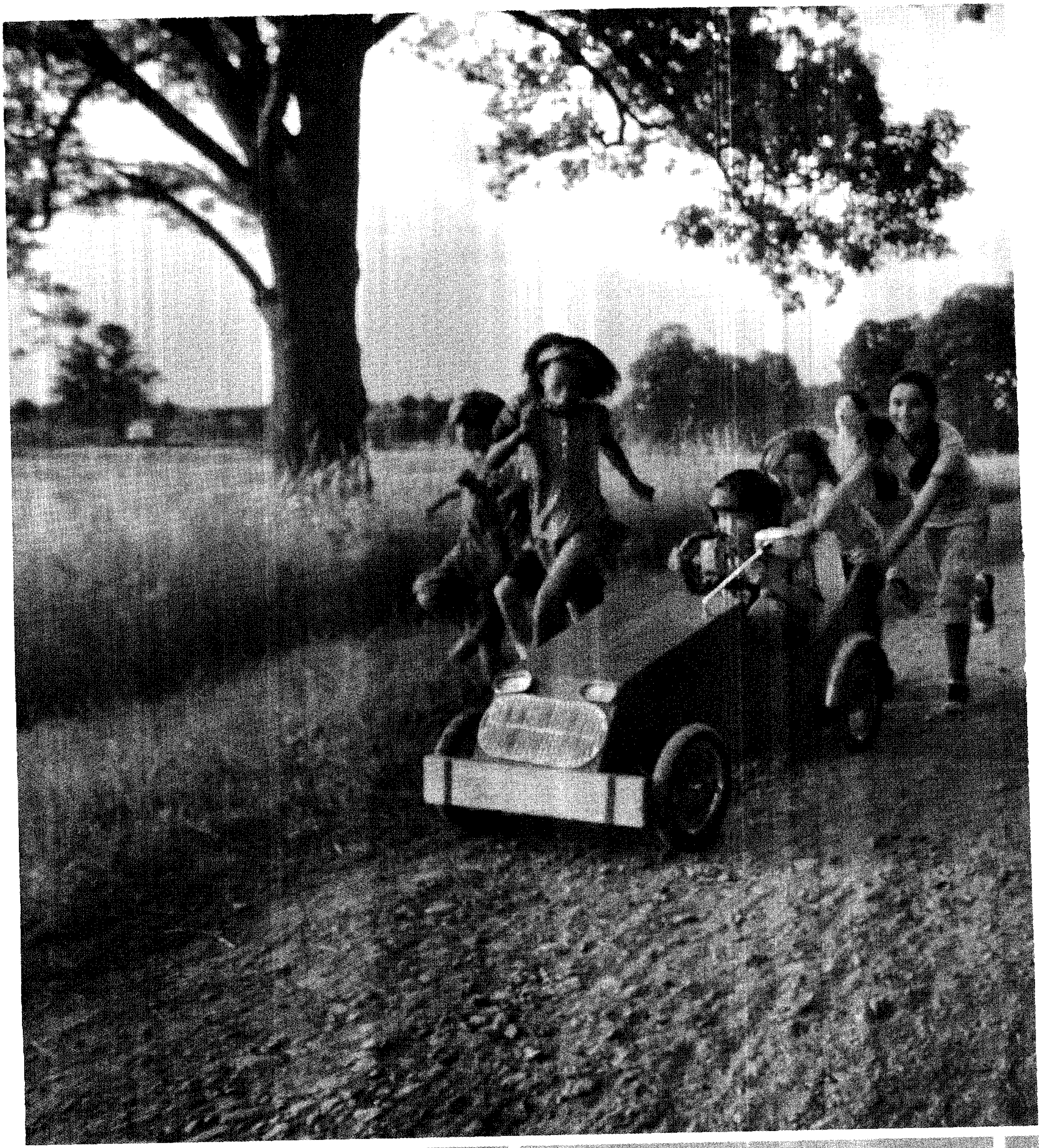

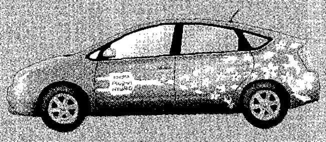

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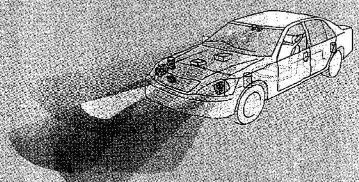

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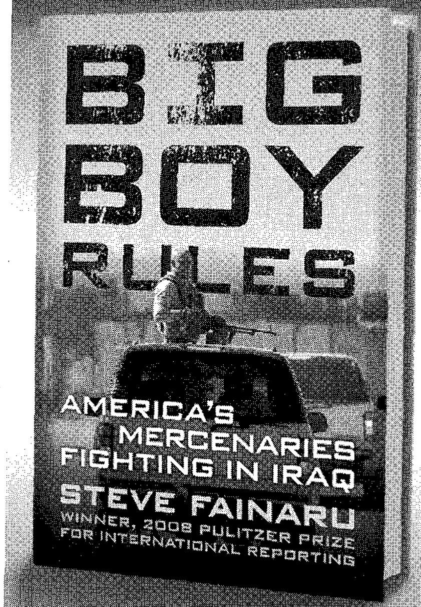
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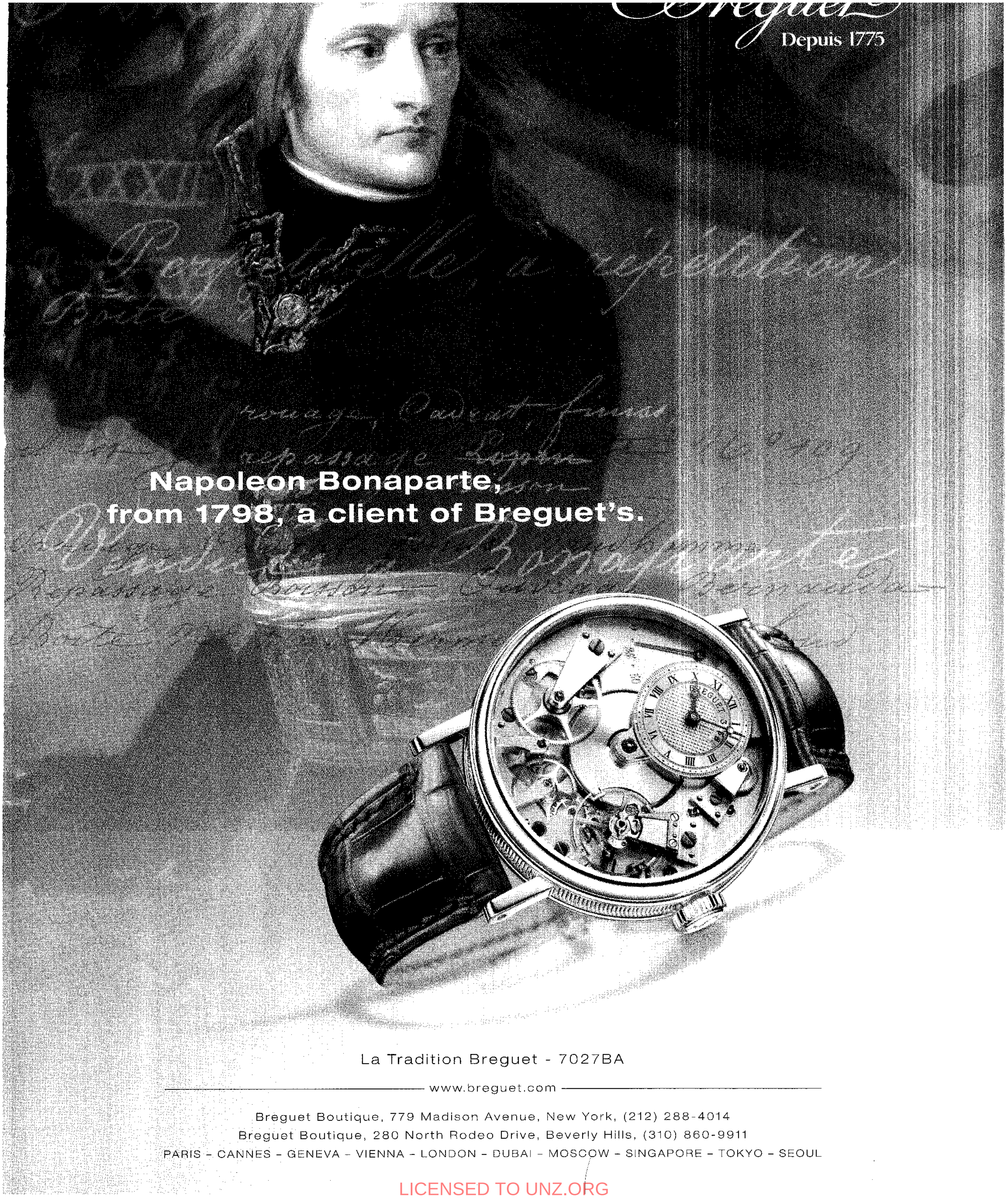
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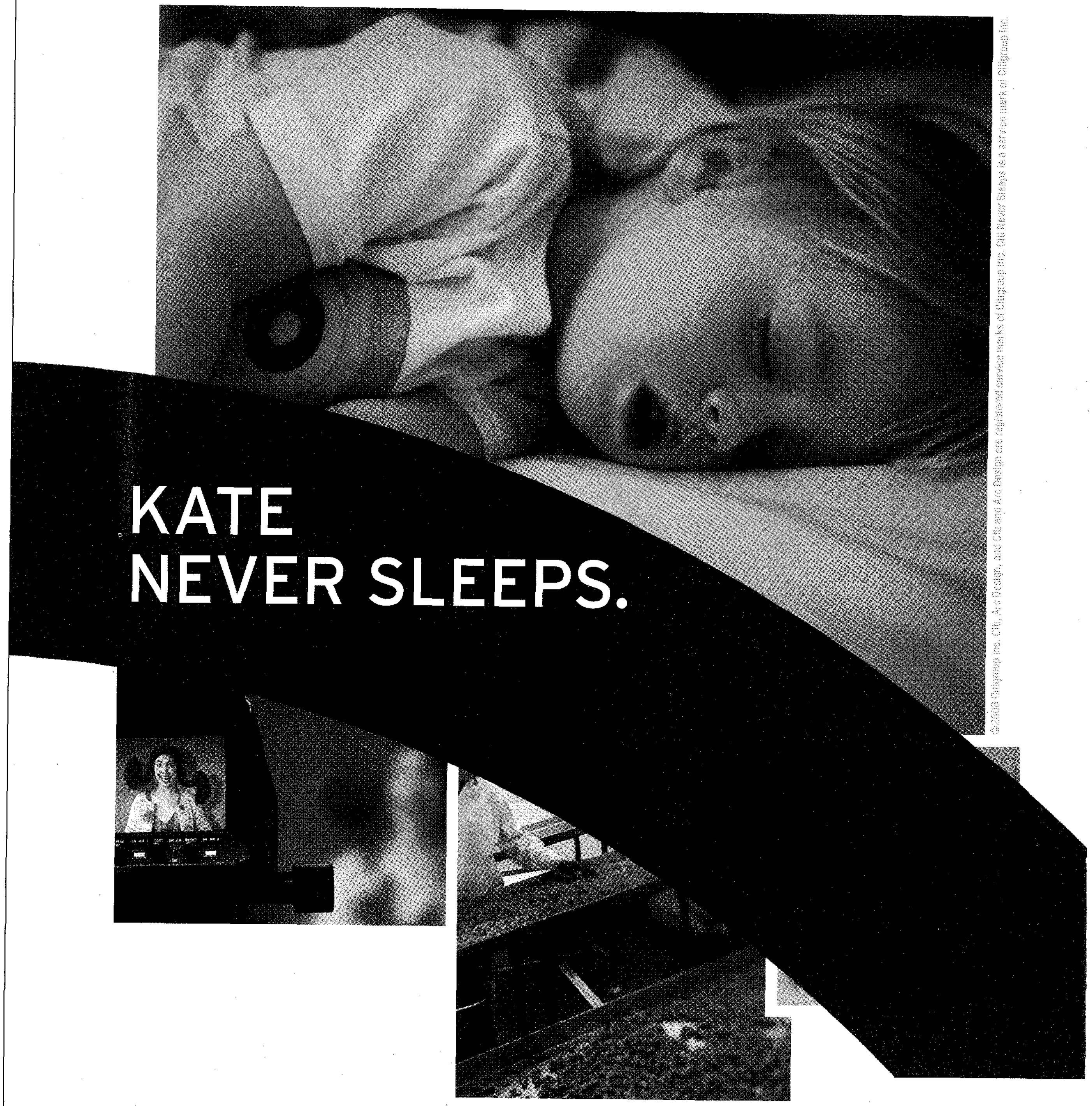
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Dreams. **Realities.**

After an evening of tantrums that shook the walls, Kate has finally begun to dream. But down the hall, her father wonders how he'll afford to send her to college, while her mother considers a larger home. Downtown, Kate's overworked pediatrician ponders an early retirement. In Bentonville, a shipment of Kate's favorite peas arrives at the baby food bottling plant. And in Sydney, a sing-along DVD is being filmed, one that'll provide Kate's grateful parents with a brand-new lullaby.

Every minute, Kate's world is being enhanced by those near and far. And every minute, Citi is helping. We're providing the college savings plan and the mortgage that'll give her family room to grow. We're enabling her doctor to plan for the future, helping the pea farmer and the food processor to reach new markets, and funding the Australian studio. It's an enormous undertaking. And an even bigger responsibility. Which is why, while Kate might sleep, we never do. citi.com/neversleeps

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For more information, visit warmthingsonline.com or call 415.472.2154.

CONTRIBUTORS

Larissa MacFarquhar ("Outside Agitator," p. 60) is a staff writer.

Elizabeth Kolbert (Comment, p. 35) reports regularly on the environment. Her book "Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change" is out in paperback.

Graeme Wood ("Policing Afghanistan," p. 42) spent a year and a half as a courier in Iraq before joining *The Atlantic*, as an editor and a writer, in 2006.

Jenny Allen (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 50) is the author of "The Long Chalkboard" and "I Got Sick Then I Got Better," a monologue, which she will perform in New York next year.

Patricia Marx ("The Price Is Right," p. 54) writes for film and television. Her children's book "Dot in Larryland," with illustrations by Roz Chast, comes out later this month.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 40), the author of "The Wisdom of Crowds," covers business, economics, and finance for the magazine.

Bob Hicok (Poem, p. 66) has published five collections of poems, including "Insomnia Diary" and "This Clumsy Living."

Ian Frazier ("The Rap," p. 72) is the author of nine books, including "Lamentations of the Father: Essays," which is due out in paperback in the spring.

Richard Wilbur (Poem, p. 78) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and translator. His translations of Pierre Corneille's "The Liar" and "Le Cid" will be published next year.

Amos Oz (Fiction, p. 82) has a new book, "Rhyming Life and Death," coming out in April. He is a founding member of Peace Now and lives in Arad, Israel.

Adam Gopnik (A Critic at Large, p. 90), a staff writer, is the author of "Angels and Ages," which will be published in January.

Joan Acocella (Dancing, p. 98) writes about books and dance for the magazine. "Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints," a book of essays, is available in paperback.

Nancy Franklin (On Television, p. 100) is the magazine's television critic.

Barry Blitt (Cover) created the illustrations for a new children's book, "What's the Weather Inside?," which will be published in March.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

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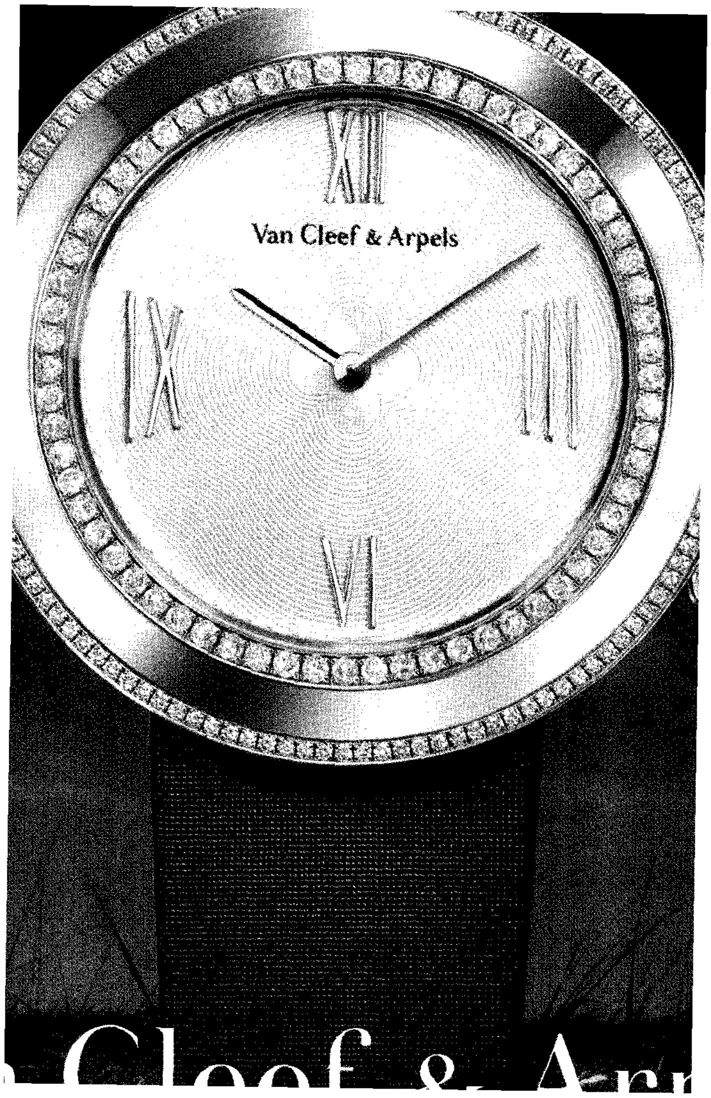
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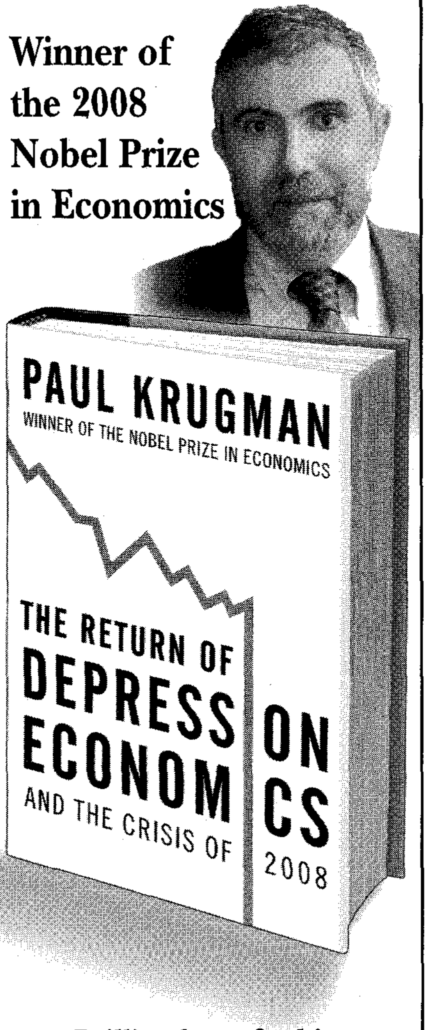
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INSIDER OR OUTSIDER?

Malcolm Gladwell argues that Sidney Weinberg, the longtime chairman of Goldman Sachs, succeeded because his status as an outsider strategically benefitted him ("The Uses of Adversity," November 10th). But in one important way Weinberg was very much an insider—gender. Would Weinberg have been able to achieve the same astonishing level of success had he been a woman? He—or, rather, she—would have been radically different from most of those who worked on Wall Street at the time. Yet it is hard to imagine that being female would have been an advantage. It would have been interesting had Gladwell considered how being male might have given Weinberg just enough insider status to make his success possible.
Charlotte Canning
Austin, Texas

OBAMA'S SOURCES

James Wood's analysis of President-elect Barack Obama's victory speech pointed to the rhetorical legacy of both Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. (The Talk of the Town, November 17th). Both Lincoln and King, in turn, were influenced by the Massachusetts abolitionist and religious reformer the Reverend Theodore Parker. Before writing the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln read one of Parker's sermons: "There is what I call the American idea . . . a democracy—that is, a government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people." And King paraphrased Parker's beautiful and optimistic advice: "Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the right. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice." I'm certain that Parker would feel his legacy more than honored by Obama's words and by the very fact of his triumph.
Cora Roelofs
Boston, Mass.

Wood did a good job of surveying the referents and paraphrases that appeared in Obama's Election Night address. But he missed one. Rephrasing Sam Cooke's famous song, Obama stated, "It's been a long time coming, but tonight . . . change has come to America." If King provided the vision, and Lincoln the gravitas, Cooke supplied the aching, hopeful tone of a speech and a candidate that have been a long, long time coming.
Nick Suplina
Brooklyn, N.Y.

COMPANY BUSINESS

The New Yorker is a fine publication, but David Remnick, in his piece on the radio station Echo of Moscow, quoted someone who has fallen prey to some of the myths about Gunvor ("Echo in the Dark," September 22nd). It is not true that our co-founder Gennady Timchenko ever owned any part of Yukos. No politician has any interest or stake in the revenues or profits of Gunvor, which is an independent company, registered in Amsterdam. We buy, sell, blend, store, and transport oil. Far from being some sort of state exporter, we deal with a variety of leading global companies, state-owned and private, internationally and in Russia. We are proud of the company we have built, and the success it has managed in a highly competitive environment where different lots of oil have to be bid for in open, competitive tenders.
Dirk Jonker
Managing Director
Gunvor International B.V.
Amsterdam, Netherlands

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FEWER, BETTER THINGS.

Our lives are full of things. Disposable distractions,
stuff you buy but do not cherish, own yet never love.
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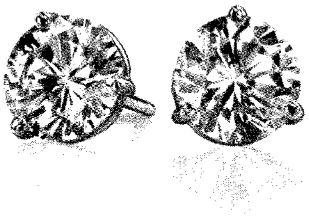
Perhaps things will be different now. Wiser choices made with greater care.
After all, if the fewer things you own always excite you, would you
really miss the many that never could?



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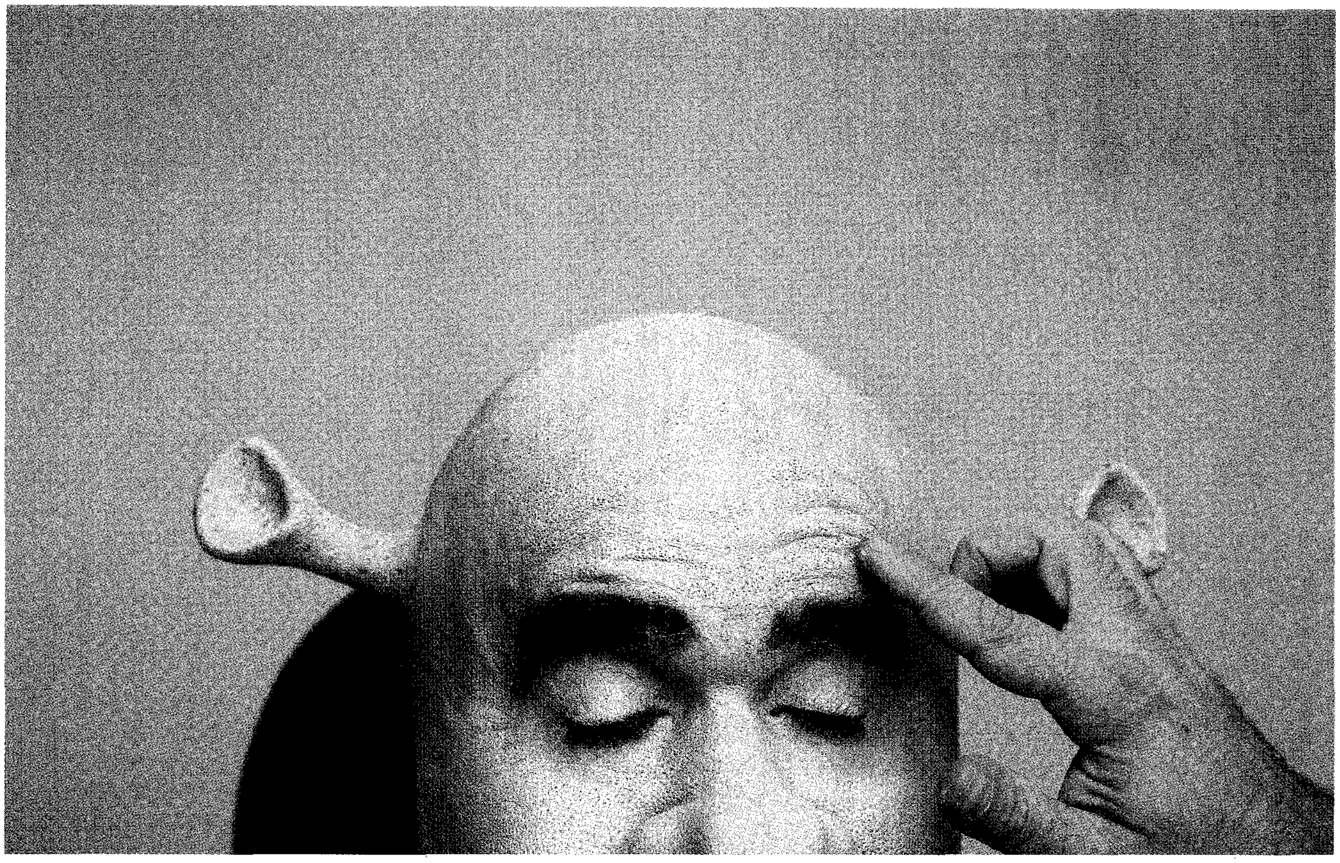


GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
7	8	9	3	4	5	6

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
IRREVERENT MOVES

Les Freres Corbusier and their artistic director, Alex Timbers—the delightfully perverse creators of "Hell House" and "A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant"—are at it again, this time with a meditation on video games and dance movies. "Dance Dance Revolution" opens at the Ohio. (See page 14.)

NIGHT LIFE
FRESH BREEZE

The Airborne Toxic Event, a Los Angeles quintet that takes its name from Don DeLillo's novel "White Noise," has a flair for crisp dance rock. The band, which has been around for only two years, will visit the Blender Theatre at Gramercy. (See page 16.)

ART
WALL IN ALL

Sol LeWitt (1928-2007) likened conceptual artists to composers and thought of his wall drawings—conceived as sets of written instructions—as musical scores that would be executed by others for generations to come. Thirty-three years after LeWitt created the room-size, white-on-black "Wall Drawing #260," MOMA installs it in a gallery on the fourth floor. (See page 18.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
MYTHIC VOICES

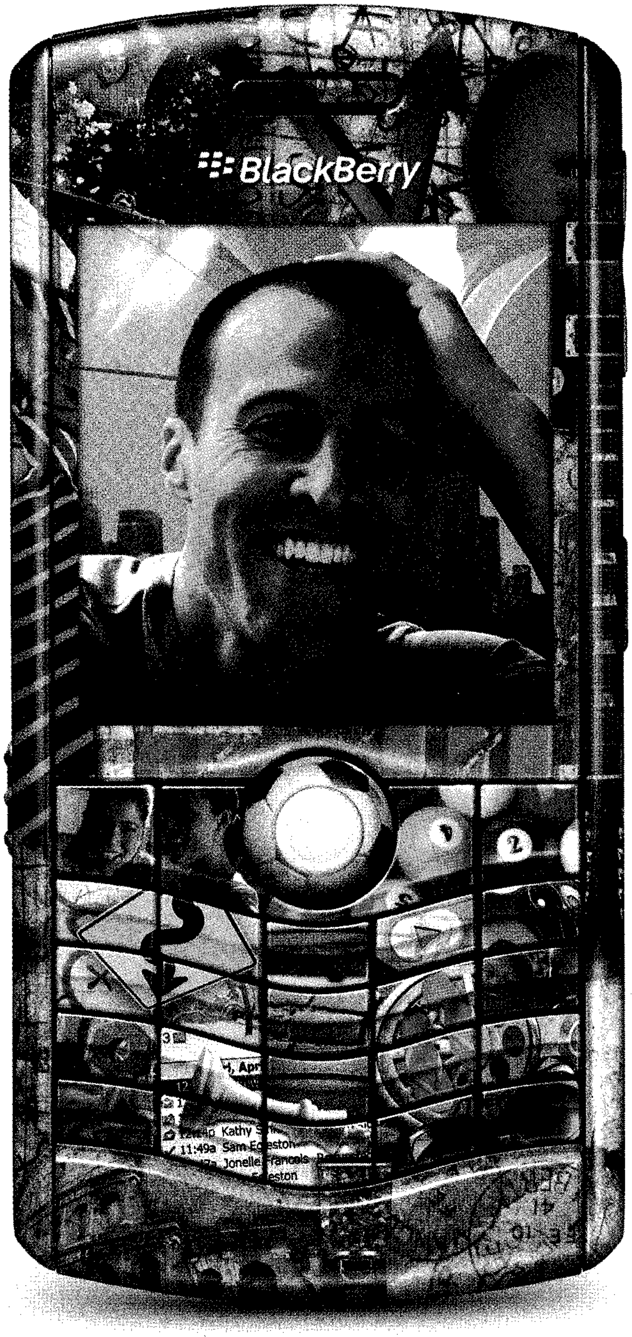
Opera-starved audiences needing a replacement for their City Opera fix are in luck this week as two big orchestras pick up the slack. The Philharmonic takes on "Elektra," Strauss's treatment of Sophocles' tragedy; and the Orchestra of St. Luke's offers "Ainadamar," Osvaldo Golijov's vision of the last hours of Federico García Lorca. (See page 25.)

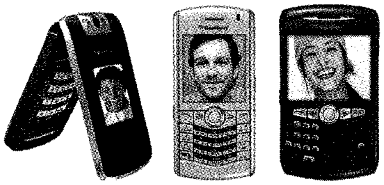
MOVIES
BLUE-EYED BLUES

BAM's memorial tribute to Paul Newman features three of his famed performances, as Fast Eddie Felson in Robert Rossen's "The Hustler," as a rocket scientist in Alfred Hitchcock's "Torn Curtain," and as a hockey bum in "Slap Shot," as well as "The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds," which he directed and which stars his wife, Joanne Woodward. (See page 30.)

Backstage at the Broadway Theatre, for "Shrek the Musical." Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

Life On BlackBerry





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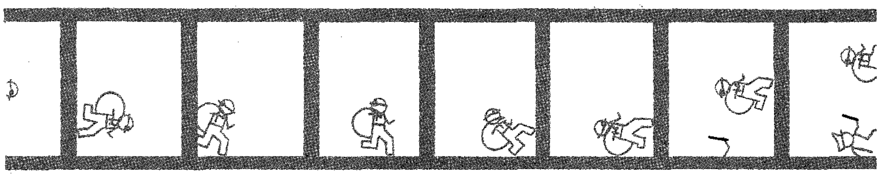
THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BEASLEY'S CHRISTMAS PARTY
The Keen Company presents Booth Tarkington's comedy, directed by Carl Forsman. In previews. Opens Dec. 7. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE BLACK MONK
Kevin Newbury directs a chamber musical by Wendy Kesselman, based on Chekhov's story about an artist from a small village who must negotiate the challenges of his rising success. Austin Pendleton stars. In previews. Opens Dec. 4. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)



LAURENT CILLUFFO

DVD NOTES
A HOUSE OF HER OWN

The late Marguerite Duras's novels, with their accretion of visual detail and incantatory dialogue, lent themselves to movies, but Duras disliked others' adaptations of her work and began, in the nineteen-sixties, to direct. Her fourth film, **"Nathalie Granger"** (in a two-disk set from Blaq Out/Facets), from 1972, is a vehicle for a pair of international divas, Jeanne Moreau and Lucia Bosé, albeit an unusually low-key one; the setting is a cluttered old house near Paris, which was Duras's own.

The central drama, teased out in small details, concerns the title character, a remote, insubordinate young girl whose mother, Isabelle Granger (Bosé), is about to send her to boarding school. The story is based on Duras's decision, years earlier, to send her real-life son, Jean Mascolo, away to school. (Nathalie is played by Jean's cousin, Valerie Mascolo, and his father, Dionys, appears briefly in the film, as her father.)

Isabelle and Nathalie share the house with a calm, orderly girl, Laurence (Nathalie Bourgeois), and her mother (Moreau). The two women are kept busy with chores—clearing a table, dredging the back-yard pond, burning piles of sticks, sewing, and ironing—but Duras evokes the artistic side of the household by contrasting Laurence's methodical piano playing and Nathalie's diffident yet transfixing noodling, which lacks technique but has genius (and resembles Duras's own keyboard improvisations, which provide the film's music).

The intensely feminine ambience is disturbed by the intrusion of a hulking door-to-door washing-machine salesman—a young Gérard Depardieu, in one of his earliest screen roles—who suffers, in the women's blankly skeptical presence, a comical breakdown that is both existential and emotional.

Duras said that her house was, in effect, her script, and she hired the acclaimed cinematographer Ghislain Cloquet to film it. His velvety black-and-white images offer views through windows and doorways, down corridors, into mirrors, and of walls and floors. Re-creating her daily existence in the old house in Neauphle-le-Château, Duras uses the apparatus of a major motion picture to make refracted home movies, as if trying to make sense of her life and surroundings—and this attitude, as much as the film's oblique drama and distinctive images, is the essence of its modernity.

—Richard Brody

BROOKLYN AT EYE LEVEL
The Civilians ("Gone Missing") present a work in progress, which is based on interviews with the players on all sides of the controversy surrounding Bruce Ratner's proposed Atlantic Yards project. Dec. 4-7. (Brooklyn Lyceum, 227 Fourth Ave., Brooklyn. To make reservations, which are required, visit www.brooklynateyelevel.org.)

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION
Les Freres Corbusier ("Hell House," "A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant") offer the première of their latest show, directed by Alex Timbers, with original songs by Gary Adler ("Altar Boyz"), about a dance prophet named Moonbeam Funk who saves the day in a society where dancing is illegal. Previews begin Dec. 3. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

DUST
Richard Masur and Hunter Foster star in a new thriller written by Billy Goda, about a wealthy executive and a minimum-wage-earning ex-con who vie for power. Scott Zigler directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 4. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE 52ND STREET PROJECT
The nonprofit organization, which partners children from Hell's Kitchen with theatre professionals, presents "Let Me Put It This Way: The Straight Talk Plays." The participating mentors include Peter Dinklage, Jessica Hecht, and Celia Keenan-Bolger. Dec. 5-7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. For reservations for free tickets, which are required, call 212-642-5052.)

GIMPEL TAM
Folksbiene mounts a musical adaptation of Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story, written and directed by Moshe Yassur, about the victimization of a gullible orphan. In Yiddish, with English supertitles. In previews. Opens Dec. 4. (JCC, 334 Amsterdam Ave. 800-595-4849.)

HOME
Three actors perform twenty-five roles in Samm-Art Williams's 1980 play. Set in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, it tells the story of a man who leaves his family in North Carolina and heads for New York City. In previews. Opens Dec. 7. (Signature Theatre Company, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

IMPROBABLE FREQUENCY
Arthur Riordan and Bell Helicopter wrote this musical, presented by Dublin's Rough Magic Theatre Company, about a British code breaker who journeys to Ireland during the Second World War to investigate a radio talk show. Lynne Parker directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 4. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

LIZA'S AT THE PALACE
Liza Minnelli returns to Broadway for a show of song and dance. Opens Dec. 3. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

OUT CRY
The National Asian American Theatre Company revives Tennessee Williams's play, in which two siblings who are abandoned by their travelling theatre company put on a show about themselves. Thom Sesma directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 4. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

PAL JOEY
At Studio 54, Roundabout Theatre Company presents the Rodgers and Hart musical from 1940, with a book adaptation by Richard Greenberg. Joe Mantello directs a cast that includes Christian Hoff, Martha Plimpton, and Stockard Channing. In previews. (254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

PHILIP ROTH IN KHARTOUM
David Bar Katz wrote this LAByrinth Theatre Company development production, about a troubled couple who come to blows during a game of truth or dare at a party. John Gould Rubin directs. Opens Dec. 4. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

PRAYER FOR MY ENEMY
Playwrights Horizons presents the New York première of a play by Craig Lucas ("Prelude to a Kiss"), directed by Bartlett Sher, about an Iraq-war soldier and his alcoholic father, who is a Vietnam vet. Starring Victoria Clark, Michele Pawk, and Jonathan Groff. In previews. Opens Dec. 9. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SHREK THE MUSICAL
DreamWorks Theatricals presents the musical adaptation of the film, with a book and lyrics by David Lindsay-Abaire ("Rabbit Hole") and music by Jeanine Tesori ("Caroline, or Change"). Jason Moore ("Avenue Q") directs; Brian d'Arcy James and Sutton Foster star. In previews. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

SLAVA'S SNOWSHOW ON BROADWAY
The Russian clown Slava Polunin returns with his snowstorm spectacular. In previews. Opens Dec. 7. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

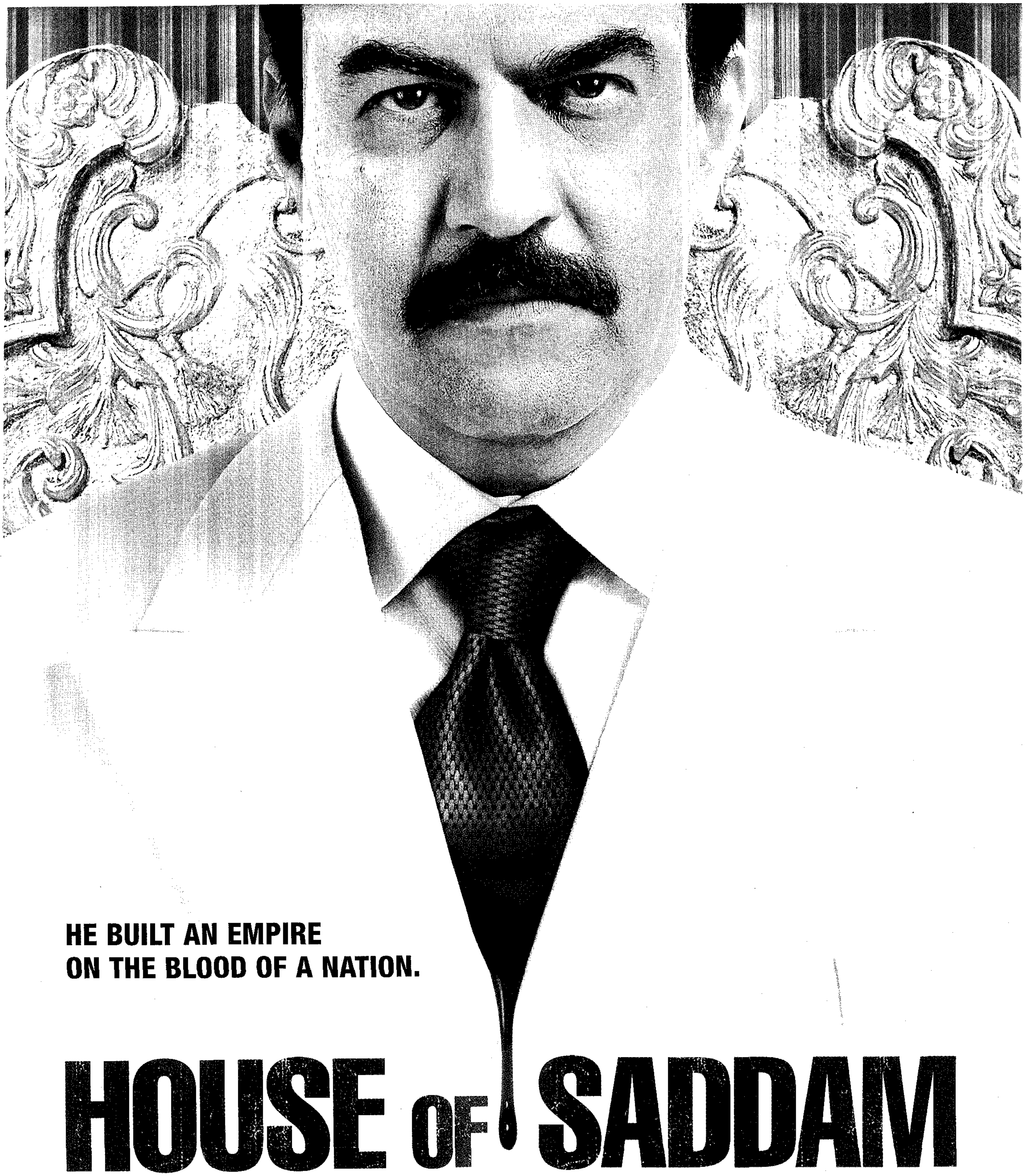
TOO MUCH MEMORY
Keith Reddin and Meg Gibson wrote this contemporary adaptation of the Antigone myth, which won the New York Fringe Festival's Outstanding Play award this year. In previews. Opens Dec. 9. (Fourth Street Theatre, 83 E. 4th St. 212-868-4444.)

NOW PLAYING

CAPE DISAPPOINTMENT
Set during an unspecified decade that resembles the Eisenhower era, the lives, desires, and memories of various passengers on three different road trips take a number of sharp and darkly comic turns over the course of one night, dissolving into three studies of bittersweet disenchantment. Two siblings see something mysterious and deeply scarring in a dark wood; linoleum salesmen are seduced by a pair of lady hoboes; a pedophile watches the young girl he's run away with turn into a young woman. Under the brilliant and rigorous direction of Oliver Butler, the Debate Society certainly doesn't disappoint in this bizarre but deeply winning homage to the drive-in cinema of yore, in which the magic is more in the storytelling than in the stories themselves. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through Dec. 7.)

IRVING BERLIN'S WHITE CHRISTMAS
Walter Bobbie has done a fine job staging this adaptation of the 1954 movie, which bequeathed us such songs as "Sisters" and "Count Your Blessings Instead of Sheep." A pair of vaudeville performers (Stephen Bogardus and Jeffry Denman, standing in for Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye) join a pair of dames (Kerry O'Malley and Meredith Patterson) and put on a big show in a cozy Vermont inn. The sets, the costumes, the dreaded Christmas cheer—it's all done with class, commitment, and just the tiniest degree of self-awareness; your saccharine meter may not go off once. The cast is better than it needs to be, and the snow, when it comes, is like manna from the god of schmaltz. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

MY VAUDEVILLE MAN!
Jeff Hochhauser and Bob Johnston found the seed for their two-person musical in a junk store: "Letters of a Hoofer to His Ma," an epistolary exchange between Jack Donahue and his worried mother during his first vaudeville tour, in 1910. Their attempt to add depth to the hoary jokes by getting maudlin over the Irish proclivity for alcoholism merely piles musical-theatre cli-


HE BUILT AN EMPIRE
ON THE BLOOD OF A NATION.

HOUSE OF SADDAM

A NEW 4-PART MINISERIES FROM HBO FILMS®

HBO FILMS PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH BBC HOUSE OF SADDAM IGAL NAOR SHOHREH AGHDASHLOO MAKRAM J KHOURY AMR WAKED PHILIP ARDITTI MOUNIR MARGOUM AND SAID TAGHMAOUI MUSIC BY SAMUEL SIM EDITORS PHILIP KLOSS AND CRISPIN GREEN PRODUCTION DESIGNER MAURICE CAIN DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY FLORIAN HOFFMEISTER EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS HILARY SALMON ALEX HOLMES WRITTEN BY ALEX HOLMES AND STEPHEN BUTCHARD PRODUCED BY STEVE LIGHTFOOT PARTS I AND II DIRECTED BY ALEX HOLMES PARTS III AND IV DIRECTED BY JIM O'HANLON

PARTS I-II: SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7 9PM
PARTS III-IV: SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14 9PM

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chés on top of vaudeville ones. As the put-upon mother, Karen Murphy does her best to wring some feeling and humor out of the pedestrian score, while Shonn Wiley, as Donahue, is believably juvenile. Yet he provides no sense of why the real Donahue broke out of the small time. This show stays there. (St. Peter's, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820.)

PERDITA
In his one-man show, Pierre-Marc Diennet plays, with real skill, both himself and his mother, a funny, brilliant feminist and activist named Perdita Huston, who committed suicide in 2001 to avoid a prolonged battle with cancer. Diennet not only inspires the audience with stories of how his mother helped women in war-torn countries, he also portrays his own fascinating relationship with her: though they travelled the world together from the time he was a baby (he was born in Algeria during the war there), she often abandoned him. Whatever Perdita may have done, she seems to have passed her best qualities on to her son; he's funny, gifted, generous, full of dignity, and, above all, brave. Linsay Firman directs. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 7.)

ROAD SHOW
Stephen Sondheim's latest musical (with a book by John Weidman) is based on the real-life tale of Addison and Wilson Mizner, brothers whose real-estate dealings helped turn Florida into a vacation destination for the leisure class. This fast-paced, alternately confusing and illuminating show opens with the oversized Addison (Alexander Gemignani) lying in bed dying. Most of the other cast members sit above him, on steamer trunks and suitcases—strong, graphic elements that constitute much of the minimal set, which was designed by the play's inventive director, John Doyle. But Wilson (Michael Cerveris), the slyer of the two, won't let his troubled, artistically inclined older brother rest in peace. This is a potentially complex portrait that isn't borne out by the text. Weidman gives us sketches, while Sondheim is intent on making a painting. The actors are caught between these two extremes, as is the audience, unsure where to focus. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/1/08.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

TAKING OVER
"I really just want all you crackers to get the fuck out of our neighborhood," Robert, a character in Danny Hoch's one-man show about gentrified Williamsburg, tells us. Hoch, a New York City native, does not appear to disagree with him. A skilled impressionist, he plays a variety of neighborhood types—a snotty French Realtor, a Chomsky-obsessed rapper—with an eye toward rising rents and shifting demographics. But he is hampered by his desire to be both portraitist and polemicist. Toward the end, as himself, he admits that he would like to take one of his characters (a hipster T-shirt vender) and "stick her into a big FedEx envelope." Fair enough, but Hoch's disdain toward his creations only impedes his ability to inhabit them. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

Also Playing

ALL MY SONS: Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BACK BACK BACK:** Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 240 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLACK WATCH:** St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. **BLASTED:** SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-352-3101. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **DIVIDING THE ESTATE:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS:** Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **MOUTH TO MOUTH:** Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **SATURN RETURNS:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **THE SEAGULL:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **SLEEPWALK WITH ME:** Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPEED-THE-PLOW:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **STREAMERS:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Dec. 5: **B. B. King,** the Master himself. Dec. 6: **Johnny Winter,** the legendary blues guitarist, returns to town. Dec. 7: When the **Seldom Scene** formed, in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1971, its ranks included an instrument repairman, a mathematician, a physician, a graphic artist, and a cartographer. Only the mathematician (Ben Eldridge, on banjo) is left from the original lineup, but the bluegrass formula remains.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 3: **Kevin Costner & Modern West.** Costner, who has danced with wolves, survived in a world of water, and delivered the mail, has taken on yet another challenging role: leading a roots-rock band. Dec. 8: The **Airborne Toxic Event,** having just completed thirty shows in thirty days in the U.K., stops by with its sharp and literate dance rock.

BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. (718-636-4100)—Dec. 4-5: The Next Wave Festival's "Red Hot + Rio 2" bill finds **CéU, Curumin, Bebel Gilberto, José González,** and many other smoking young artists offering their take on samba soul, a Brazilian musical movement from the seventies.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Dec. 4: **Suicidal Tendencies** came out of the Southern California hardcore-punk scene of the early eighties and quickly became superstars of the genre. The band, led by the burly skateboard fanatic Mike Muir, went on to court the heavy-metal demographic, but it never lost its way. Dec. 5: Fresh from quitting both the hard-rock supergroup Velvet Revolver and the briefly reunited ersatz-grunge combo Stone Temple Pilots, the mercurial vocalist **Scott Weiland** has relaunched his solo career with the album "Happy in Galoshes." He's headlining K-ROCK's annual holiday show.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 6: **If by Yes** is a dreamy pop ensemble led by the electronics maven Yuka Honda and the virtuosic singer Petra Haden, who is one of the jazz bassist Charlie Haden's triplet daughters. The group, which has been gestating for nearly a decade, has a début album due out next year. Honda's gentle and fractured electronic soundscapes provide the perfect backdrop to Haden's endearing and stunningly precise vocal lines. Rounding out the band are several downtown musicians on saxophone, guitar, and drums.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Dec. 5-6: The Brooklyn group **Yeasayer** is riding a wave of buzz for its mix of indie rock and outré African, Bollywood, and Middle Eastern sounds. They follow the globe-trotting path blazed by David Byrne and Paul Simon, but, guided by the ghost of Syd Barrett, they seem less interested in crossover pop success than in mind-bending experimentation.

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NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 5-6: Twenty years ago, the irreverent Long Island heavy-metal band **Twisted Sister** locked horns with Tipper Gore's Parents Music Resource Center. My, how times have changed. These days, the band members, who still have a habit of dressing like unconvincing transvestites, prefer to perform Christmas carols. They deliver "O Come All Ye Faithful," "Silver Bells," and other holiday favorites—in a fist-pumping, head-banging style, of course.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Dec. 4: Every few weeks, for the past decade or so, DJ Rekha has been sharing the joys of updated Punjabi folk music with her **"Basement Bhangra"** dance parties.

SOUTHPAW
125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-230-0236)—Dec. 5: North Carolina's **Squirrel Nut Zippers** (who take their name from an old-time candy bar) made a big splash in 1997 with the hit song "Hell," a quirky ode to damnation couched in a slippery hybrid of big-band music and hot jazz. The group rode the crest of the retro-swing craze and quietly slipped from the scene after the release of its album "Bedlam Ballroom," in 2000. Recently, however, they got back together, picking up right where they left off.

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Dec. 2-3: The guitarist **Jorma Kaukonen** and the bassist **Jack Casady** became rock stars in the sixties, when their San Francisco psychedelic protest band, the Jefferson Airplane, hit it big. But the two started playing together in the D.C. area as kids, in 1958, which makes this a fiftieth-anniversary tour. These old friends will mostly be in electric Hot Tuna mode (with the drummer Eric Diaz and the multi-instrumentalist Barry Mitterhoff). **Ollabelle** opens on Dec. 2, and **Larry Keel** on Dec. 3.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Dec. 5: **Grace Potter and the Nocturnals** roll down from their home in the mountains of Vermont for a night of bluesy rock. Dec. 7: The local favorites **Nada Surf.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Dec. 3-6: **Grady Tate,** a brilliant drummer who favors singing these days, is supported in grand style by the pianist **Kenny Barron,** among others.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—**Curtis Stigers** and **Rachelle Ferrell** are singers who extend the vocal-jazz tradition through imaginative repertoires and unconventional styling. They split the week here, with Stigers in Dec. 2-4, and Ferrell Dec. 5-7.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The bighearted, gruff-voiced entertainer **Steve Tyrell** holds court through the end of the year.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Dec. 2-7: **Kenny Werner** is an accomplished and ambitious pianist and composer whose gifts are best set off in fast company; his present quintet includes the trumpeter **Randy Brecker,** the saxophonist **David Sanchez,** and the drummer **Antonio Sanchez,** major players all.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Dec. 2-30: "The Sinatra Holiday Project" combines two of **Michael Feinstein's** most successful musical endeavors, his recent reinterpretation of the work of Ol' Blue Eyes and his ecumenical show of seasonal songs. It's a two-for-one evening of artful mirth that's perfect for the times.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Dec. 3-7: Two old-school practitioners of the Hammond electric organ, **Dr. Lonnie Smith** and **Ruben Wilson,** are joined by a younger acolyte, **Joey DeFrancesco.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Dec. 5-6: **Paquito D'Rivera,** the saxophonist and clarinet virtuoso who has come to personify Cuban-American music, joins up with the **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra** for a program of Cuban big-band sounds.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Dec. 5-7: **Pablo Ziegler,** the pianist with the late Astor Piazzolla's now legendary New Tango Quintet, leads his own ensemble with **Hector del Curto** on bandoneón. Guests from the jazz world include the saxophonist **James Carter** (Dec. 5-6) and the vibraphonist **Joe Locke** (Dec. 7). The Mingus tribute bands are in rotation on Mondays.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-796-0741)—Dec. 9: Three musicians as deeply influenced by the music of the Indian subcontinent as they are by jazz—the saxophonist **Rudresh Mahanthappa,** the guitarist **Rez Abbasi,** and the tabla player **Dan Weiss**—unite in the Indo-Pak Coalition. Later that night, the trumpeter **Dave Douglas** and his horns-and-drums quintet, **Brass Ecstasy,** take the stage.

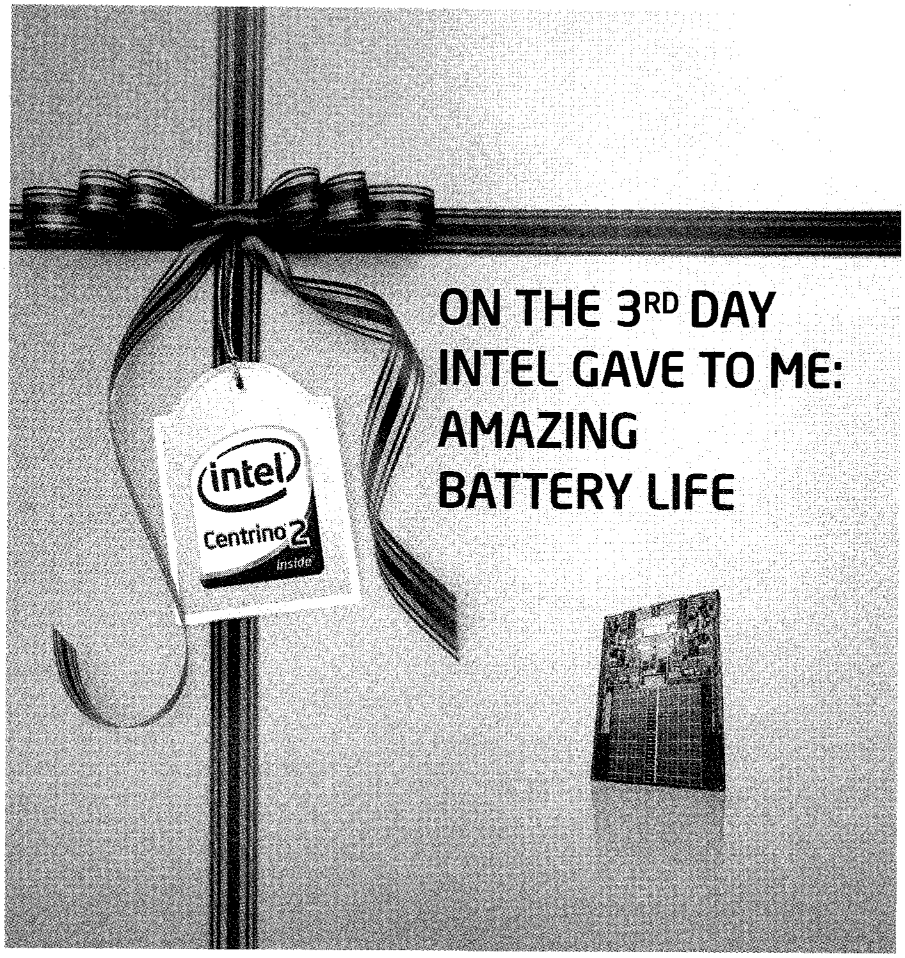
SOFIA'S RESTAURANT
221 W. 46th St. (212-719-5799)—What better way to distract yourself from the current financial crisis than by tapping your foot or dancing to **Vince Giordano** and his **Nighthawks,** specialists in the propulsive sounds of twenties and thirties jazz. On Monday nights, they play Club Cache, a downstairs room at this Italian restaurant adjacent to the Hotel Edison. Note: During the winter months, you enter through the hotel's lobby (look for the sandwich-board sign and lighted sousaphone on the street, and follow the arrows to the action).

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—The pianist **Geri Allen** (here with her trio Dec. 2-7) keeps her music fresh and her audience attentive; she has one foot in the avant garde and the other on jazz terra firma. A personnel change in Allen's trio helps keep things moving: **Kassa Overall** has replaced the veteran drummer Jimmy Cobb. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C."** Through March 15. ♦ **"The Philippe de Montebello Years: Curators Celebrate Three Decades of Acquisitions."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964."** Through Dec. 14. ♦ **"Art and Love in Renaissance Italy."** Through Feb. 16. ♦ **"Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717)."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Raqib Shaw."** The young London-based Indian artist reinterprets Old Master works in his psychedelically colored, opulently embellished enamel paintings. He finds a cozy match at the Met, where he's paired his own Holbein-inspired works with two dozen small woodcuts by the German artist depicting Death (made circa 1526). Shaw applies his enamel with a porcupine quill, producing surfaces as rich as cloisonné; the addition of glitter, rhinestones, and fake pearls gilds an already extravagant lily. Images familiar from art history are reworked with those of butterflies and blood, chrysanthemums and syringes, peacock feathers and barbed wire. Shaw's mingling of beauty and violence conveys the same macabre fixation on death and moral rot as the Hol-



beins do, albeit updated with a flourish of disco decadence. Through March 1. ♦ **“New York, N. Why?: Photographs by Rudy Burckhardt, 1937-1940.”** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **“The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End.”** Through March 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**“Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927-1937.”** Through Jan. 12. ♦ **“Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night.”** Through Jan. 5. ♦ **“Pipilotti Rist: Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters).”** Through Feb. 2. ♦ **“New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky.”** Through Jan. 5. ♦ **“Focus: Sol LeWitt.”** Opens Dec. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8. The museum will remain open until 8:45 one Monday per month through April, beginning Dec. 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**“Theanyspacewhatever.”** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **“Catherine Opie: American Photographer.”** Through Jan. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**“William Eggleston: Democratic Camera, Photographs and Video, 1961-2008.”** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **“Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933.”** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **“Corin Hewitt: Seed Stage.”** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **“Signs of the Times.”** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**“The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell.”** Through March 29. ♦ **“Gilbert & George.”** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **“Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions.”** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **“Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection.”** Through Feb. 8. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**“Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future.”** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **“The Horse.”** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **“The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter.”** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**“The Seduction of Light: Ammi Phillips/Mark Rothko, Compositions in Pink, Green, and Red.”** Through March 29. ♦ **“Martin Ramirez: The Last Works.”** Through April 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and until 7:30 on Fridays.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**“Wall Stories: Children’s Wallpaper and Books.”** Through April 5. ♦ **“Solos: Tulou/Affordable Housing for China.”** Through April 5. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DIA AT THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA
Audubon Terrace, Broadway at 155th St. (212-926-2234)—**“Zoe Leonard: Derrotero.”** Through Sept. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 4:30, and Sundays 1 to 4.)

THE DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**“Matt Mullican: A Drawing Translates the Way of Thinking.”** Through Feb. 5. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**“Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze.”** Through Jan. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**“Susan Meiselas: In History.”** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **“Cornell Capa: Concerned Photographer.”** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **“America and the Tintype.”** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **“Living with the Dead: W. Eugene Smith and World War II.”** Through Jan. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**“Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theatre, 1919-1949.”** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **“The Dead Sea Scrolls: Mysteries of the Ancient World.”** Through Jan. 4. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**“Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors.”** Through Jan. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**“Mary Heilmann: To Be Someone.”** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **“Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton.”** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **“Museum as Hub: Six Degrees.”** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

PALITZ GALLERY
11 E. 61st St. (212-754-5121)—**“Michelangelo: The Man and the Myth.”** Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 7. To buy tickets, visit ticketweb.com.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**“NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith.”** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **“Gino De Dominicis.”** Through Feb. 9. ♦ **“Leandro Erlich: Swimming Pool.”** Through April 13. ♦ **“Yael Bartana.”** Through Jan. 19. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**“Barkley L. Hendricks: Birth of the Cool.”** Among the powerful realist paintings in this timely four-decade survey are a portrait of a drug dealer rendered in the style of the Flemish baroque artist Anthony Van Dyck and another of a young woman whose Afro is set off against a gold background, as if in a Byzantine icon. A Miles Davis album provides the show’s title, and, like the Juilliard-trained trumpeter, Hendricks has élite establishment bona fides—he studied painting at Yale. His work fuses elements of high European art with the pop culture of the American streets, and the best works here are those from the seventies, with their sly allusions to Black Power and their masterly technique. But all of Hendricks’s work looks very au courant—his influence is palpable in the works of at least two much younger artists with current gallery shows, Jeff Sonhouse and (especially) Kehinde Wiley. Through March 15. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JEFF SONHOUSE
Images of black masculinity are passing through a crucible of change, and the figures in Sonhouse’s paintings are no exception. Pompadours are built up in puffs of steel wool and piles of paper matches; eyes are scribbled out with glitter. One badass avatar sports a harlequin pattern that has spread from his shirt to his face. Another opens his overcoat to reveal lightning in the lining. A third sits at desk behind a nameplate and a microphone, as if speaking at the U.N. All are unidentified—except for a butch-looking Condoleezza Rice, the lone female, her unmistakable visage swathed in herringbone tweed. Through Dec. 23. (Tilton, 8 E. 76th St. 212-737-2221.)

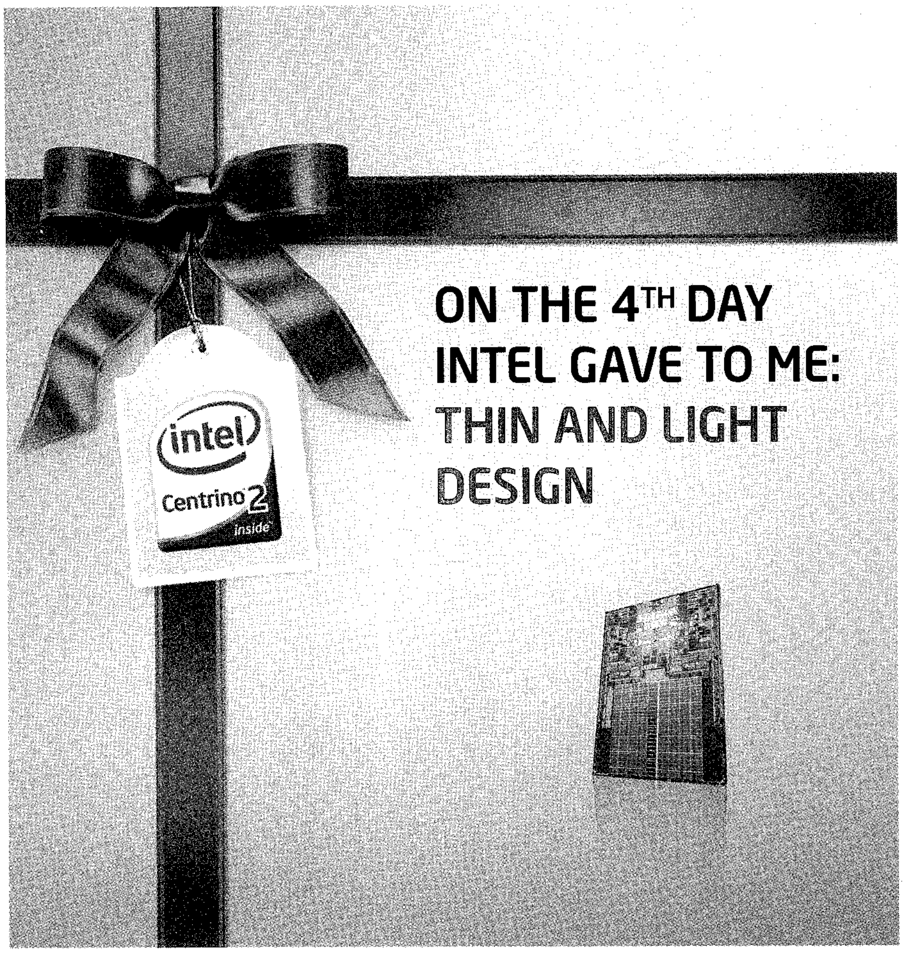
ADAM VAN DOREN
The gallery where Van Doren shows his diminutive paintings has the feel of an old library—a

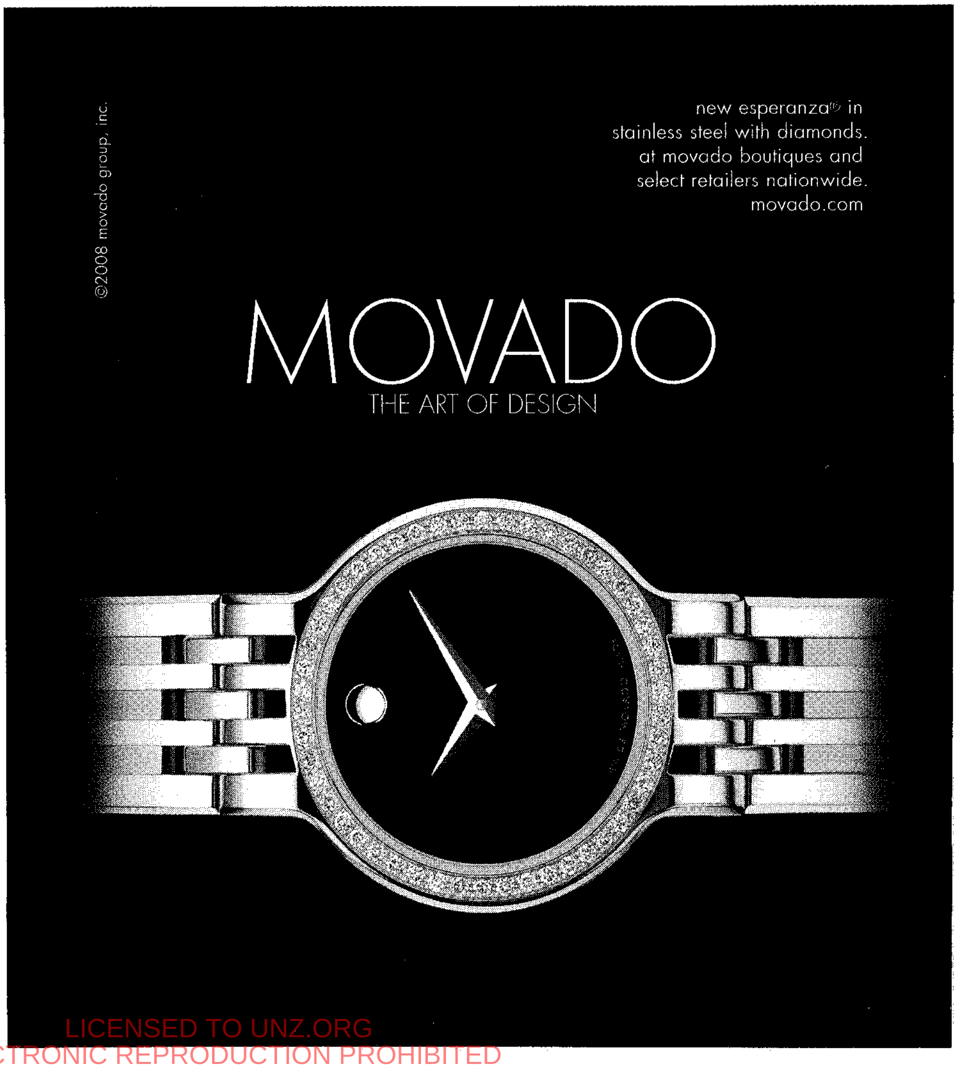
FEMALE FIGURE (CA. 1800-1700 B.C.)/ANKARA MUSEUM OF ANATOLIAN CIVILIZATIONS, TURKEY

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
PAST PERFECT

Archeology wonks aside, "Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.," at the Met, is sure to beggar viewers' sensibilities. Let it. The show is a rare chance to assess, at one go, what one doesn't know about makings and doings in Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Levant, and the Aegean, circa the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. Those were globalist times, on the evidence of cargo—artifacts from twelve cultures—recovered from a fourteenth-century B.C. shipwreck and displayed alongside a life-size mockup of the ship, as one part of a show that careens from Mycenae and Crete to Ashur and Ur. Battalions of pitilessly educational wall texts and labels besiege about three hundred and fifty often tiny, mostly terrific objects in ivory, gold, silver, lapis lazuli, and lots else. Duly benumbed, you may slip the odd item of power or caprice into a pocket of memory, to take home. I have dibs on the Old Babylonian ceramic relief of a naked, steamily erotic "Queen of the Night" (perhaps Ishtar, the versatile goddess of love and war) who rests her clawed feet on lions, flanked by owls.

—Peter Schjeldahl





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fitting setting for the son of an Encyclopaedia Britannica editor and the grandson of a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. Paintings conceived while the painter was a visiting artist at the American Academy in Rome recall grand-tour scenes from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; Whistler, in particular, is evoked by the dots of color used to describe nocturnal lights flickering on water. Depictions of San Marco and the Grand Canal in Venice, architectural ruins, and boats on the Thames could double as illustrations for a Henry James tale of Americans abroad. Through Dec. 6. (Renaissance Studios, 130 W. 57th St. 212-586-8342.)

Short List

JOHN BALDESSARI: Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Jan. 10. **JOHN MARIN:** Ward, 44 E. 74th St. 212-744-7306. Through Dec. 20. **CINDY SHERMAN:** Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Through Dec. 20. **ALEXI WORTH:** D. C. Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111. Through Jan. 3. **"HELEN FRANKENTHALER AT EIGHTY":** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Through Jan. 10. **"ISABEL AND OTHER INTIMATE STRANGERS":** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Dec. 13. **"POWER STRUCTURE":** Roth, 160A E. 70th St. 212-717-9067. Through Dec. 13.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

LUIGI GHIRRI

This big, surprising, and thoroughly enjoyable survey of Ghirri's work from the nineteen-seventies and eighties fills in a significant gap in the history of contemporary color photography. With images in many different sizes and styles, from conceptual to documentary, the show is evidence of a restless and playful imagination—one that regarded photography as "a great adventure in thinking and looking." Ghirri teases the idea of landscape with images of toy houses in a net bag, a building in a snow globe, and a woman looming over a scale-model city. But no matter how intellectual, his pictures about pictures project pleasure, amusement, and an openness to the unexpected. Through Jan. 29. (Aperture, 547 W. 27th St. 212-505-5555.)

BILL JACOBSON

Known for foggy photographs that suggest both the fading and the persistence of memory and desire, Jacobson has sharpened his focus over the past few years, and his new work is the most successful in this vein. His subject is a familiar, historic one—the American West—but his desert landscapes are very nearly abstract studies of flattened space and tamped-down color. Not much goes on in these large vertical patches of earth and sky, but Jacobson's minimalism is vibrant and warm; he makes the most of the dark curve of a dune at dusk or the infinite stretch of pale-blue sky above creamy sands. Through Dec. 24. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

ANDY WARHOL

It's hard to believe there's anything left in the Warhol archives that hasn't already been overexposed, but these seventy little Polaroids—many used as studies or sources for the artist's silk screens, drawings, and paintings—will be brand-new to most viewers. Made between 1977 and 1983, they reprise many of the artist's signature subjects (Brillo boxes, Campbell's soup cans, high heels) along with other, more allusive objects (knives, crosses, false teeth, guns) in graphic still-life arrangements. A gray human heart sits on a red Fiestaware plate, but, typically, Warhol doesn't give it any more weight than he does a pair of pink satin ballet slippers. Through Jan. 10. (Kasmin, 511 W. 27th St. 212-563-4474.)

TERRY WINTERS

A strong show finds the perennial whiz kid of abstract painting making chromatic mud pies. As a scientist of pictorial space, Winters has often painted in ways most properly suited to drawing. Now paint counterattacks, melting gridded formats that he terms "Knotted Graphs" (a typically abstruse topological concept) into swarming masses of split and splintered geometric nodes. Heavy buildups of semi-transparent pigments—notably, refreshing blues and smoldering reds, with purple offspring—squeeze space out of illusive depth and into the room. Call it Neo-Orphism, the lyrical effusion of a reborn, only slightly starchier Robert Delaunay. Through Jan. 24. (Marks, 523 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

Short List

TOMMA ABTS: Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Dec. 23. **PETAH COYNE:** Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470. Through Dec. 13. **DANA HOEY:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Dec. 20. **PAUL P.:** Reich, 537A W. 23rd St. 212-924-4949. Through Jan. 10. **KAY ROSEN:** Gray, 526 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636. Through Jan. 10; Lambert, 550 W. 21st St. 212-242-3611. Through Jan. 3. **CINDY SHERMAN:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Through Dec. 20. **KELLEY WALKER:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through Dec. 13. **JONAS WOOD:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Jan. 3. **"LOOKING BACK":** White Columns, 320 W. 13th St. 212-924-4212. Through Dec. 13. **"THE WORLD IS ALL THAT IS THE CASE":** Hudson Franklin, 508 W. 26th St. 212-741-1189. Through Dec. 20.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

CORY ARCANGEL

The young New York artist is best known for hacking video games (his elegant Conceptual one-liner, "Super Mario Clouds," was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial). Only one work here fits that formula: a bowling game, altered so that the balls always land in the gutter. Others strike out in a new direction—albeit one familiar to fans of both Jeremy Blake and Seth Price—incorporating abstract, even "painterly" imagery, achieved using a range of technologies from VHS to 16-mm. film to digital downloads. Arcangel's playful use of outmoded formats is still fresh and intriguing—and sometimes hilarious—but his approach feels both skittish and scattered here. Through Dec. 20. (Team, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219.)

DANIEL HESIDENCE

Hesidence's show might be titled "1779/Pedestrians," but his abstract paintings are less about life on the street than they are about life after death. Human form, when depicted at all, exists only in contours. Most of the seventeen canvases here center on smeary ovoid shapes, featureless, save for an occasional, voiding-out "X." They could be heads but read more like auras. The varied palette is bright without being happy and the extensive use of glaring white feels almost sinister. With his undulating brushwork, smudging, stippling, and thick impasto, Hesidence creates a lyrical netherworld. Through Dec. 7. (Feature, 276 Bowery. 212-675-7772.)

ELIZABETH NEEL

The artist's grandmother is the legendary figurative painter Alice Neel, but don't expect to see portraits in her solo début. Instead, Neel joins the ranks of young artists (see Brown, Cecily) working in a neo-New York School style of abstraction. Her gestural canvases, rendered in oil on canvas and rich with slashing brushstrokes in fleshy pink, owe more than a little to Willem de Kooning, but they're an exhilarating ride in their own right. Smaller works, in acrylic on paper, are muddier, and their titles—"Shits and Giggles," "From Bad to Worse"—do little to enrich the viewing experience, although the brown and red splat of "Thanksgiving" does have a distinctly beheading-the-turkey feel. Through Dec. 6. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 212-343-7300.)

Short List

AUGUSTO ARBIZO: Envoy, 131 Chrystie St. 212-226-4555. Through Dec. 14. **ERNST CARAMELLE** Williams, 513 W. 4th St. 212-229-2757. Through Dec. 23. **JOSÉ LEÓN CERRILLO:** Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Through Jan. 31. **CLIFFORD OWENS:** On Stellar Rays, 133 Orchard St. 212-598-3012. Through Dec. 14. **CAROL RAMA:** Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977. Through Dec. 20. **LORNA SIMPSON:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through Dec. 13. **KEHINDE WILEY:** Deitch, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Through Dec. 20.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

BRUCE OF LOS ANGELES
Bruce Bellas took photographs of mostly naked men in the nineteen-fifties and sixties, when the censors targeted homoerotica, so he never worked under his full name. As Bruce of Los Angeles, he produced an astonishing number of pictures, and the more than fifty black-and-white ones here are prime examples of his glossy, glam style. The men—all-American guys, athletic and sleek—are treated as sculptures in the neoclassic mold, even when posed in the desert among rudely phallic cacti. Like so many Hollywood image-makers of the time, Bruce did his best to keep the sex subliminal, but his pictures still give off plenty of heat. Through Dec. 20. (Wessel + O'Connor, 111 Front St. 718-596-1700.)

JOEL STOEHR / ANDREA WAY
In 2007, Way made a drawing a day. Here, the three hundred and sixty-five notebook-size abstractions are grouped by month. Rather than notating current events or diaristic confessions, they seem to chart moods—in bursts of limpid watercolor, tight whorls of ink and ballpoint pen, patterns stamped with inked pennies. The sense of meditative accumulation in Way's work is a counterpoint to Stoehr's sculpture in the back room—titled "Tower of Babel," it's constructed of laser-cut museum board and festooned with little water tanks, cranes, scaffolding, and power lines. The ivory-colored surface is pristine, but a gritty, naked-city intensity pulses through nonetheless. Through Dec. 21. (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Balanchine's "Nutcracker," from 1954, offers sugarplums and snowflakes, plenty of scintillating dancing, and Tchaikovsky's wonderfully imaginative score. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Dec. 2, Dec. 4, and Dec. 9 at 6; Dec. 5 at 8; Dec. 6 at 2 and 8; and Dec. 7 at 1 and 5. Through Jan. 3.)

LIMÓN DANCE COMPANY
One of the few companies created by a modern-dance giant to have survived its founder's death, José Limón's troupe celebrates the centennial of his birth, with Anna Sokolow's "Rooms," from 1955, a revival of Limón's "The Traitor," and Clay Taliaferro's "Into My Heart's House." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 2 at 7:30, Dec. 3 at 7, Dec. 4-5 at 8, Dec. 6 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 7 at 2 and 7:30.)

"FRÄULEIN MARIA"
Doug Elkins brings back his enormously popular "Sound of Music"-inspired revue, on the theory that there is a little bit of the wayward Alpine nun in all of us. This year's expanded version features the usual double-entendres and imaginative stagecraft, as well as new sketches and an enlarged cast,

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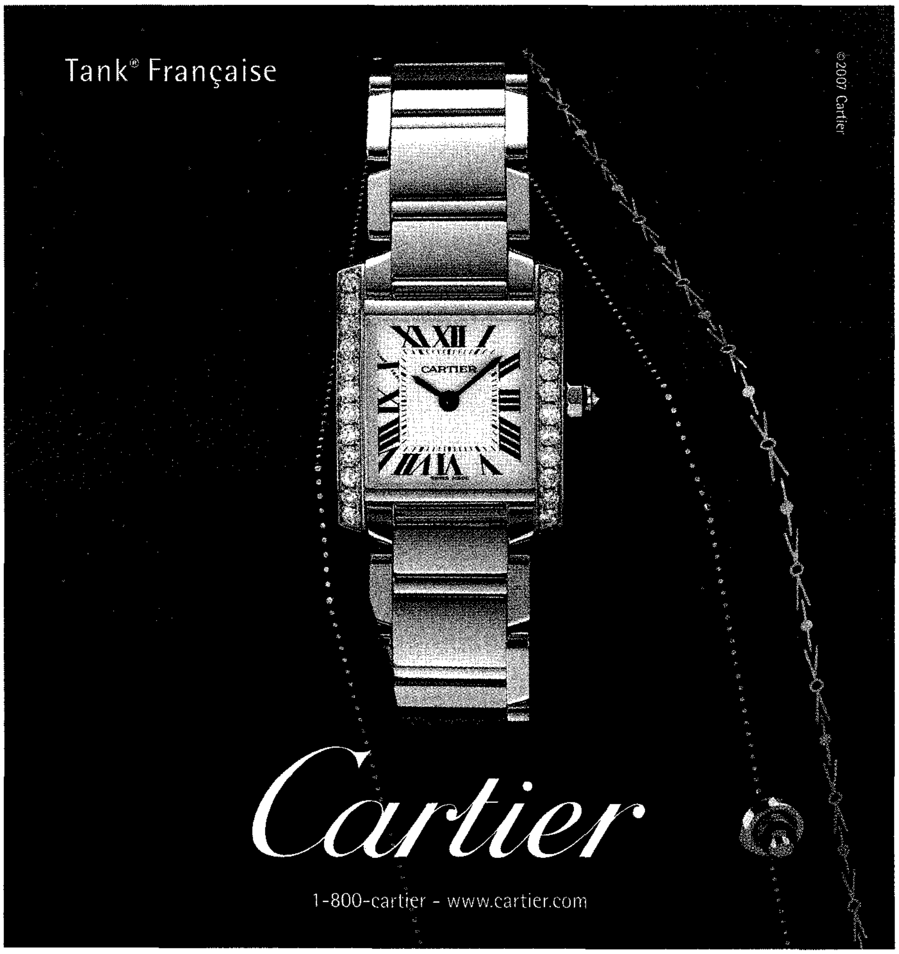

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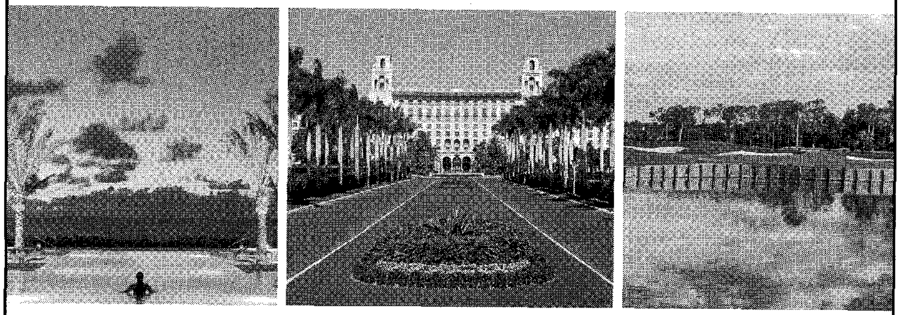

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FAVORITE THINGS

Doug Elkins's "Fräulein Maria," which will be performed this week and next at Joe's Pub, is a parody of, and a love letter to, "The Sound of Music." In "Sixteen Going on Seventeen," the demure Liesl, played by a large man in a pink dress, looks on, fascinated, as another man, Archie Burnett—even larger, and black—rips off his shirt and does a dance combining voguing and whacking (Burnett is a famous club dancer) with a great deal of ordinary lubriciousness, to show her how things are going to be when she's seventeen. But this is not camp, or not of the one-note variety. Each dance is a jewel of choreographic invention and comic subtlety, and, this being a pub, you can have dinner while watching the show. (But don't get a table too close to the stage. Last year, one of the performers, in mid-number, leaned over and sampled a spectator's drink.) Elkins, a star of the nineties dance scene, folded his company in 2004. Right now, "Fräulein Maria" is all you can see of his work. Justly, its greatest number is his solo, in a hoodie, to "Climb Every Mountain."

—*Joan Acocella*

including Elkins, the voguer Archie Burnett, David Parker, and Deborah Lohse. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Dec. 3 and Dec. 5 at 7:30 and Dec. 6 at 1:30 and 7:30. Through Dec. 13.)

KYLE ABRAHAM / LAYARD THOMPSON
Dance Theatre Workshop offers a double bill of young choreographers with a penchant for gender-bending provocation. Abraham, a fierce and supple performer, confronts the place of a gay black man in hip-hop culture, with "Brick." Thompson, a fierce and outrageous dancer, applies Deborah Hay-style vocalizations to an installation-and-costume combo co-created with the glitter-fabulous designer Machine Dazzle. The title sets the tone: "Cup...puC......K......Ohhhh, Beauty, full, vessel." (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 3-6 at 7:30.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
Looking mighty good for its age, the Ailey troupe kicks off its fiftieth-anniversary residency at City Center with a diva-fest of a gala: onstage will be not only its artistic director, Judith Jamison, but Oprah; not just powerhouse singers for "Revelations" but Jessye Norman. Some of that glamour should carry over to the rest of the first week, otherwise notable for the première of "Go in Grace," an it-takes-a-village story choreographed by the company member Hope Boykin, which includes the harmonizing ladies of Sweet Honey in the Rock as part of the village. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 3 and Dec. 9 at 7, Dec. 4-5 at 8, Dec. 6 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 7 at 3 and 7:30. Through Jan. 4.)

ANNE CARSON
The bracingly original poet dips into the world of dance, collaborating with the Cunningham-taught choreographers Jonah Bokaer and Rashaun Mitchell. In "Stacks," Carson drones poems that were inspired by the piled cardboard boxes of the sculptor Peter Cole, while dancers, choreographed by Jonah Bokaer, negotiate the towers—even as Cole rearranges them. In "Bracko," Mitchell realizes some of Carson's translations of Sappho fragments, brackets and all, with a cast that includes Elizabeth Streb. (Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-352-3101. Dec. 4 at 8.)

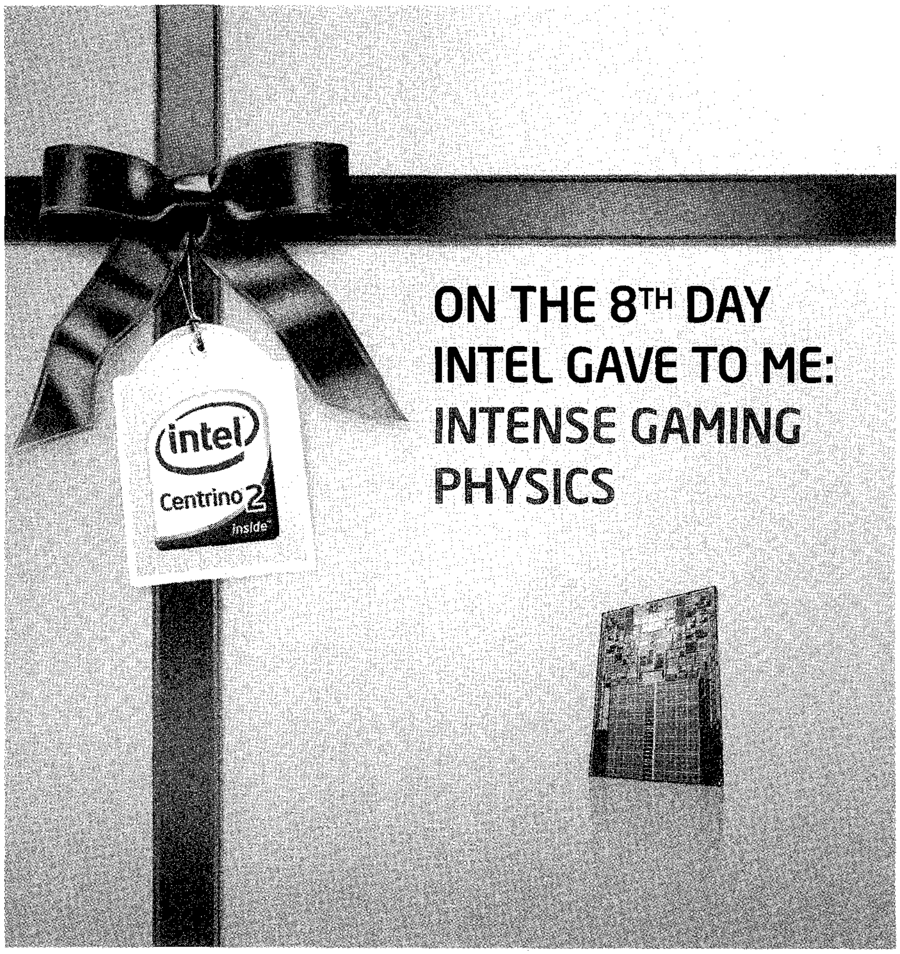
TINA CROLL AND BRYAN HAYES
Two veterans of downtown dance join forces for their first collaboration, "Little Impromptu," a comedy in near-darkness in which a pair of tramps vie for the spotlight. Croll also contributes a new solo and an ensemble piece that builds on her recent interest in Eastern European folk rhythms. Hayes follows a long-standing enthusiasm of his own—the layering of video projection and movement—in a solo for Alexis Steeves. (University Settlement, 184 Eldridge St. 212-453-4532. Dec. 4-6 at 8.)

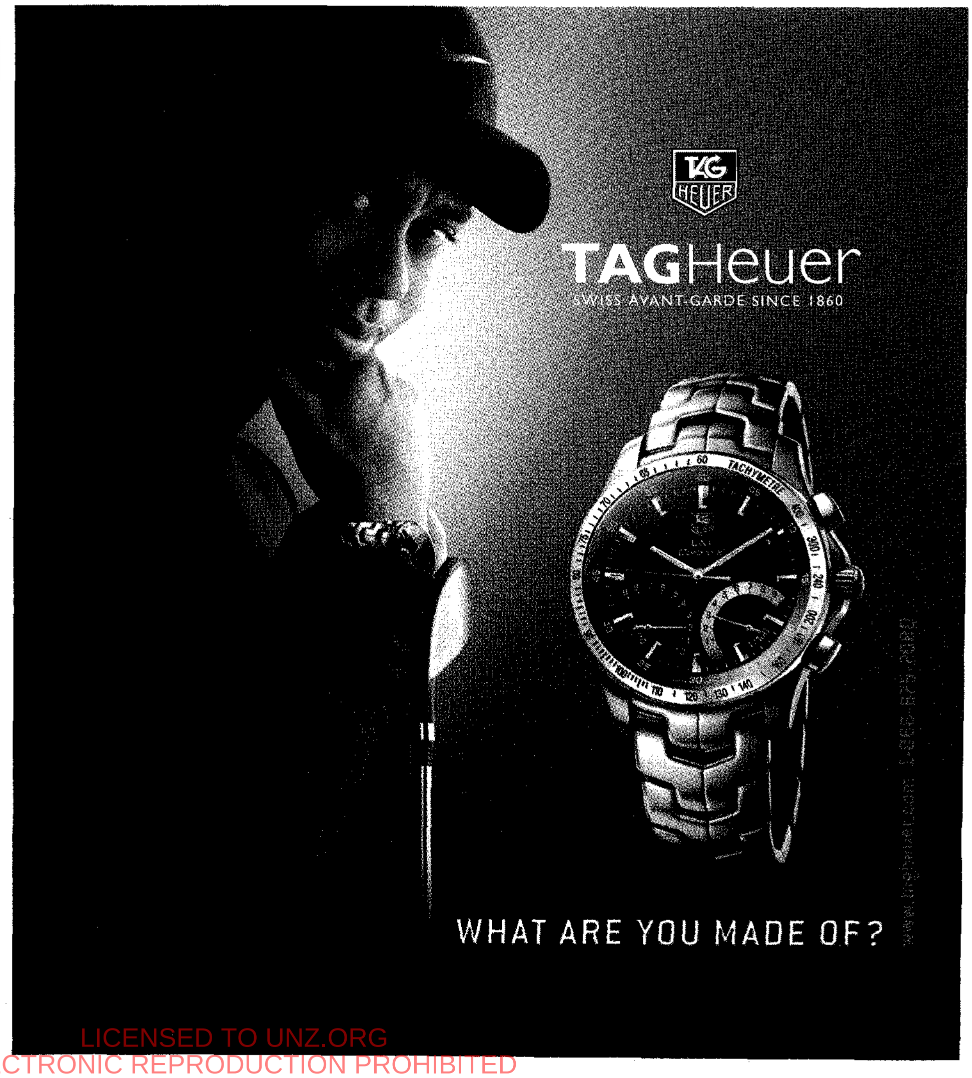
MISNOMER DANCE THEATRE
Chris Elam's company comes to Joyce SoHo with a three-part evening of new works, including "Zipper," set to an original composition by Evan Ziporyn (the clarinettist for the Bang on a Can All-Stars), which will be played live by the Real Quiet ensemble for the first four shows. (155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Dec. 4-7 at 8. Through Dec. 14.)

MOVEMENT RESEARCH FALL FESTIVAL
A multinational cross-section of the experimental-dance scene will converge at Danspace and other locations over the next two weeks to try out improvisational dance techniques. The first week involves works inspired by the pioneer of contact improvisation Steve Paxton; a game of reinvented Chinese checkers is a starting point for movement ideas. For a full schedule, visit www.movementresearch.org. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Dec. 4-6 at 8:30. Through Dec. 13.)

"STREB AT SLAM: INVISIBLE FORCES"
Elizabeth Streb invites audiences into her Lab for Action Mechanics, in order to share some new toys. Streb likes machines that manufacture forces for her acrobat-athletes to master. The most striking gizmo is a huge hamster wheel plus counterweight, which revolves, Ferris-wheel fashion, as it spins; running inside and around it, and springing off it, the group plays with zero-gravity pockets and the rhythms of revolutions. A turntable floor

AKIKO KATO





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transfers all that to the horizontal plane, an inner circle rotating independently from the outer to add centripetal and centrifugal shifts to a theatre in the round. Motorized harnesses designed by M.I.T.'s Media Lab send three performers up and down a wall, a SLAM team more mobile than the SWAT variety. (SLAM, 51 N. First St., Brooklyn. 212-352-3101. Dec. 5 at 7, Dec. 6 at 3 and 7, and Dec. 7 at 3. Through Dec. 21.)

CUNNINGHAM BEACON EVENT
Merce Cunningham Dance Company presents its fifth Event (of eight) at the Dia:Beacon, an hour north of New York. It is well worth the trip to see these powerful, unnervingly focussed dancers up close as they perform on an "L"-shaped platform adjacent to John Chamberlain's whimsical twisted-steel sculpture "The Privet," from 1997. (Beacon, N.Y. 845-440-0100, ext. 45. Dec. 6-7 at 2.)

BENJAMIN MILLEPIED / DANSES CONCERTANTES
Millepied, the thirty-four-year-old French-born principal dancer at New York City Ballet, has been making ballets for everyone from American Ballet Theatre and the Pacific Northwest Ballet to the Paris Opera Ballet and Baryshnikov. His pickup company, now populated by a select group of up-and-coming A.B.T. dancers (including Isabella Boylston, Sarah Lane, Melissa Thomas, Thomas Forster, and Cory Stearns), returns to the Joyce with a program that includes two works by Millepied, with live music. His newest ballet, "Without," is a suite of dances set to Chopin preludes, a tribute of sorts to one of his early mentors, Jerome Robbins. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 9 at 7:30. Through Dec. 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
After an absence of nearly sixteen years, Seiji Ozawa returns to the Met to conduct a dramatically alert, emotionally harrowing account of Tchaikovsky's **"The Queen of Spades,"** set amid the cold grandeur of tsarist Russia in Elijah Moshinsky's richly atmospheric production. The cast features Ben Heppner as Ghermann, the indefatigable Maria Guleghina as Lisa, and Felicity Palmer, one of opera's great character actresses, as the Countess. (Dec. 3 at 8 and Dec. 6 at 8:30.) ♦ Digital interactivity comes to the Met with Robert Lepage's new production of **"La Damnation de Faust,"** the thrilling, quasi-operatic oratorio by Berlioz, which allows the cast (including a dexterous group of acrobats) to defy the strictures of space and gravity that would normally limit the visual potential of Goethe's diabolical tale. With fine singing from Marcello Giordani, Susan Graham, John Relyea, and, of course, the Met chorus; Derrick Inouye. (Dec. 4 at 8.) ♦ A new conductor—Lothar Koenigs, the music director designate of the Welsh National Opera—brings **"Don Giovanni"** back to the repertory; the cast features not only the magnetic Erwin Schrott in the title role but also Tamar Iveri, Matthew Polenzani, and Ildebrando D'Arcangelo. (Dec. 5 and Dec. 9 at 8.) ♦ Daniel Barenboim, once the big man of Chicago, is taking New York by storm. With a piano-duo recital with James Levine behind him and a solo recital on the Metropolitan Opera stage yet to come (Dec. 14), he plunges into the main task of his Gotham residency, **"Tristan und Isolde"**—which happens to be his Met début. Barenboim's knowledge of Wagner is profound, though his conducting of it is ultimately governed by his own, usually intense impulses. He will lead a formidable cast: Katarina Dalayman, Michelle DeYoung (whose rendition of Brangäne last season was nothing short of revelatory), Peter Seiffert, and Kwangchul Youn. (Dec. 6 at 11 A.M.) ♦ Renée Fleming, the Met's unrivalled prima donna, is on a Massenet tear, and so it is Massenet that she will get for her next production—specifically "Thaïs," which is best known on this side of the Atlantic as a vehicle for Beverly Sills. The story, based on a novel by

Anatole France, mixes sentimental religiosity with Orientalist decadence; Massenet's music is varied, tuneful, and a model of craft. With Michael Schade and Thomas Hampson; Jésus López-Cobos. (Dec. 8 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC: "ELEKTRA"
The Met's fulsome offerings this week are complemented by two of the city's major orchestras, indulging their audiences with concert performances of operas. Lorin Maazel's mighty Philharmonic leads off with Strauss and Hofmannsthal's penetrating treatment of the Sophocles tragedy, featuring an impressive cast: Deborah Polaski (making her Philharmonic début in the title role), Anne Schwanewilms, Jane Henschel, Julian Tovey, and Richard Margison. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 4 and Dec. 9 at 7:30 and Dec. 6 and Dec. 13 at 8.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S: "AINADAMAR"
Osvaldo Golijov, one of the few contemporary composers who can match Adams and Glass in name recognition, made his first plunge into opera in 2003 with this one-act exploration of the last hours of the poet Federico García Lorca, who was executed by Spanish Fascists in 1936. With Dawn Upshaw, Kelley O'Connor, and Emily Albrink; Robert Spano conducts. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 7 at 2.)

LA SCALA OPENING NIGHT
The Metropolitan Opera has led the way in putting high-definition opera broadcasts in movie theatres, but the rest of the business is catching up fast. Columbia University's Miller Theatre will host this first-ever live theatrical transmission of the fabled Milanese company's opening-night performance—"Don Carlo," with Ferruccio Furlanetto, Giuseppe Filianoti, Fiorenza Cedolins, and Dolora Zajick; Daniele Gatti conducts. (Broadway at 116th St. www.cuarts.com/calendar/tickets. Dec. 7 at noon.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

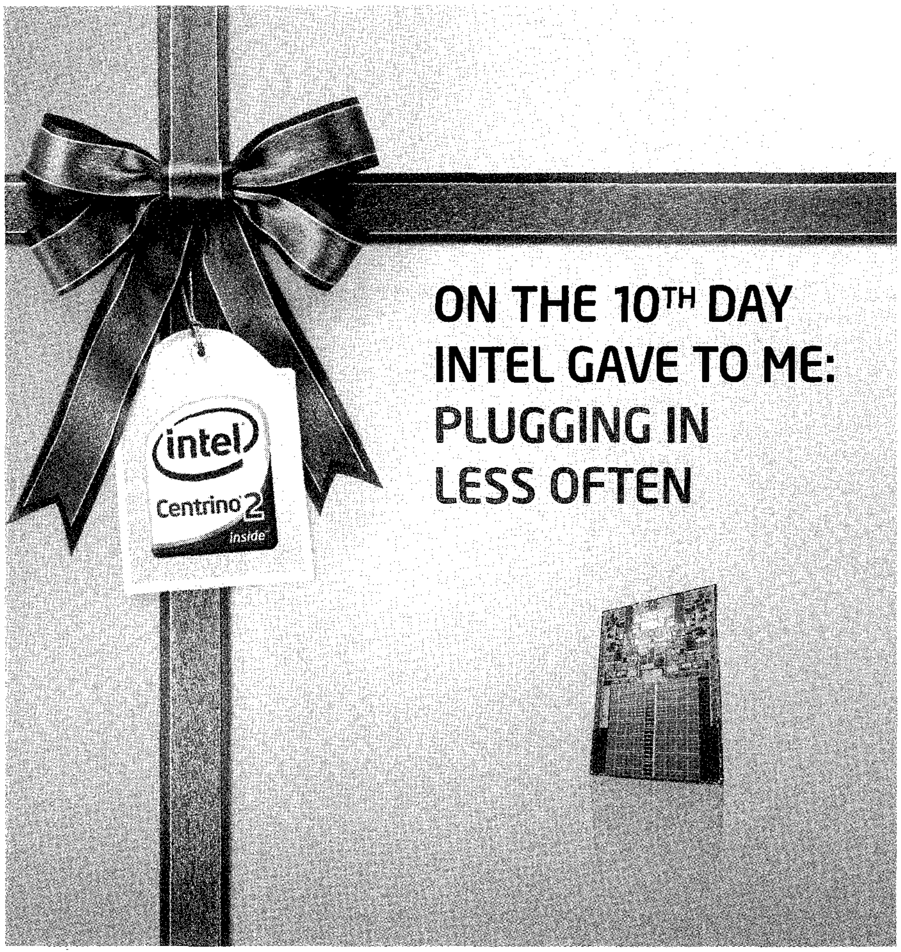
AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
The phenomenal Daniel Hope—until recently, the violinist of the Beaux Arts Trio—lends some real star quality to Leon Botstein's latest outing with his orchestra, a program exploring neo-Romantic works from the nineteen-twenties by Walter Braunfels, Hermann Suter (the Violin Concerto), and Joseph Marx (the "Autumn Symphony"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-868-9276. Dec. 7 at 3.)

COLLEGIATE CHORALE
The Chorale, accompanied by the New York City Opera Orchestra, sings Verdi's Requiem in honor of its late director, Robert Bass, who died in August. The vocal soloists, a formidable lot, are Adrienne Pieczonka, Stephanie Blythe, Ramón Vargas, and Ain Anger; Daniele Callegari conducts. (212-247-7800. Dec. 8 at 7.)

RECITALS

PIOTR ANDERSZEWSKI
The impeccable young Polish pianist takes the stage at Carnegie Hall to perform music by Bach, Schumann ("Faschingsschwank aus Wien"), Janáček, and Beethoven (the Sonata No. 31 in A-Flat Major). (212-247-7800. Dec. 3 at 8.)

DAVID DEL TREDICI
The brilliant and flamboyant New York neo-Romantic pushed the limits of classical-music subject matter with "My Favorite Penis Poems" (1998-2001), which numerous venues turned down before Symphony Space agreed to present the world première. Also included are performances of two other Del Tredici song cycles, "Wondrous the Merge" and "Miz Inez Sez"; the singers are Melissa Fogarty and Robert Frankenberry, with the composer at the piano. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 4 at 7:30.)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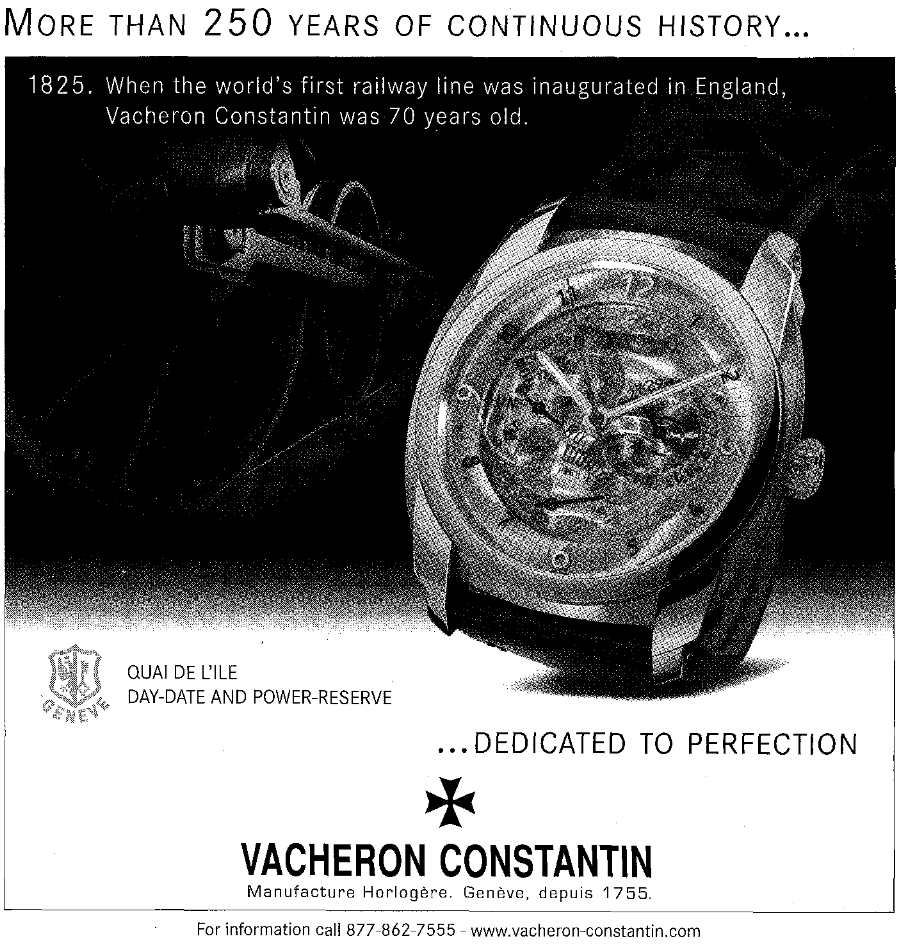
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"WORDLESS MUSIC" SERIES
The eclectic new-music series, in residence at the music club (Le) Poisson Rouge, presents the Wordless Music Orchestra (conducted by the director of the New York Youth Symphony, Ryan McAdams) in a concert in which Arvo Pärt's "Tabula Rasa" anchors new works for strings by Andrew Norman ("Gran Turismo") and Jeff Myers. (158 Bleecker St. www.lepoissonrouge.com. Dec. 4-5 at 7:30.)

"THE MOVADO HOUR"
Three sterling string players—Jennifer Frautschi, Beatrice Muthelet, and Alisa Weilerstein—gather at the Baryshnikov Arts Center for a one-hour concert (preceded by a wine reception) featuring Kodály's Duo for Violin and Cello and Beethoven's String Trio in C Minor, Op. 9, No. 3. (450 W. 37th St. Dec. 5 at 7. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 212-279-4200.)

KRONOS QUARTET AND GLENN KOTCHE
Wilco's formidable drummer (who is increasingly branching out into experimental classical) joins the invaluable new-music string quartet in the New York première of his work "Anomaly," part of a concert that also includes pieces by George Crumb (the Vietnam-era classic "Black Angels") and Ramallah Underground, among others. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 5 at 7:30.)

TILL FELLNER
With András Schiff finishing a Beethoven series at Carnegie Hall, this fascinating young Austrian pianist begins a three-year survey of the sonatas at the Metropolitan Museum. This concert features the Sonatas Nos. 16-18 (including the "Tempest") and the Sonata No. 28 in A Major. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 5 at 8.)

MILLER THEATRE COMPOSER PORTRAIT: MARC-ANDRÉ DALBAVIE
To his advocates, this forty-something French composer, a protégé of Pierre Boulez, has brought a dose of glamour to French modernism. The superb International Contemporary Ensemble (conducted by Cliff Colnot) gives him the full "Portrait" treatment in a concert of his works (including the world première of his Cello Concerto). (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Dec. 5 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
The Knights, New York's finest young strings-about-town, provide expert advocacy for contemporary composers in a concert featuring not only Osvaldo Golijov's Piazzolla tribute, "Last Round," but also new works by Jeff Snyder, Kate Soper, and others. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Dec. 6 at 8 and Dec. 7 at 4. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

LIONHEART
Up at the Cloisters, the Metropolitan Museum's grand medieval pile in northern Manhattan, the admired male choral sextet offers a program of Christmas music from fifteenth-century Italy. (Fort Tryon Park. 212-650-2290. Dec. 7 at 1 and 3.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS
The Jens Nygaard tribute ensemble, always searching out unlikely corners of the repertory, teams up with an impressive guest artist—the soprano Christine Goerke—for a concert of vocal and instrumental works by Strauss, Schumann (the Piano Quartet), Beethoven ("Abscheulicher!," from "Fidelio"), Franz Alexander Pössinger, and Robert Kahn. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259. Dec. 8 at 2 and 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

THE BLACK BALLOON
Elissa Down directed this drama, about a family's efforts to cope with an autistic child. Starring Rhys Wakefield, Toni Collette, and Gemma Ward. Opening Dec. 5. (In limited release.)

CADILLAC RECORDS
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Dec. 5. (Quad Cinema.)

CIAO
A drama, directed by Yen Tan, about a man who starts a relationship with his late boyfriend's former lover. Opening Dec. 5. (Sunshine Cinema.)

DUST
Hartmut Bitomsky directed this documentary, about various aspects of floating particles, including those resulting from the Sept. 11th attacks. In German. Opening Dec. 3. (Film Forum.)

THE END OF AMERICA
The filmmakers Annie Sundberg and Ricki Stern's documentary adaptation of Naomi Wolf's book, which argues that American civil liberties are in jeopardy. Opening Dec. 3. (IFC Center.)

FROST/NIXON
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 5. (In limited release.)

PUNISHER: WAR ZONE
A thriller, directed by Lexi Alexander and based on the comic-book series, about a vigilante who is being pursued by a mobster's posse. Opening Dec. 5. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

AUSTRALIA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

CADILLAC RECORDS
Weaving together the life stories of some of America's musical legends, the director Darnell Martin chronicles the rise and fall of Chess Records, the great Chicago blues label of the fifties and sixties. Adrien Brody stars in the vague and underwritten role of the company's co-founder, Leonard Chess. His climactic scenes with Beyoncé Knowles (who plays the troubled singer Etta James) are unconvincing and overly dramatic. But, before it all unravels, the movie highlights inspired performances that bring to life the soulful—and undisciplined—ways of some of the greatest bluesmen and early rockers. With Jeffrey Wright, who is brilliantly seductive as Muddy Waters; Columbus Short, as Little Walter; Cedric the Entertainer, as the songwriter Willie Dixon; a joyous Mos Def as Chuck Berry; and, in a small but unforgettable performance, Eamonn Walker, as Howlin' Wolf.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

A CHRISTMAS TALE
The new film from Arnaud Desplechin, best known here for "Kings and Queen" (2004), weighs in at exactly two and a half hours, yet it barely finds time to peer beyond the battlefield of a single family. We are swiftly introduced to Abel (Jean-Paul Roussillon) and Junon (Catherine Deneuve), who live in Roubaix, France—the director's home town. Junon is suffering from cancer, and both of them suffer from their children: the endlessly grieving Elizabeth (Anne Consigny), the frankly irredeemable Henri (Mathieu Amalric), and Ivan (Melvil Poupaud), who is holding steady, despite the fact that his wife loves somebody else. In an often disorienting mixture of rages, flashbacks, speeches to the camera, and nods to other movies, the story rolls and stammers along, drawing the family into a Christmas get-together but denying them more than a glimpse of the harmony that we might, by tradition, expect. Desplechin's film is hard, funny, and upsetting, and even at the end we feel that we are only just getting to know these people, though it could be argued that they scarcely know themselves. With Emmanuelle Devos, who laughs at the whole pack of them, and Chiara Mastroianni (Deneuve's real-life daughter). In French.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/24/08.) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

FENGMING: A CHINESE MEMOIR
This heartbreaking, scathing documentary, directed by Wang Bing, is composed mainly of a nearly three-hour-long interview with an elderly woman, He Fengming, who recounts the persecutions that she and her family endured during China's Anti-Rightist Movement of 1957 and then, again, during the Cultural Revolution. Sitting in her home in waning light, she is filmed in fixed-focus shots (the first one runs an hour and keeps running even when she gets up to go to the bathroom). She and

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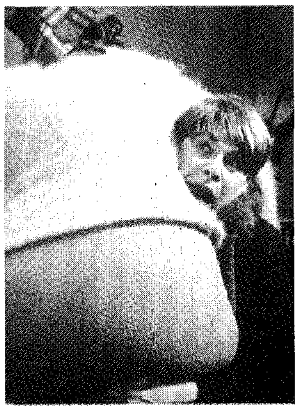
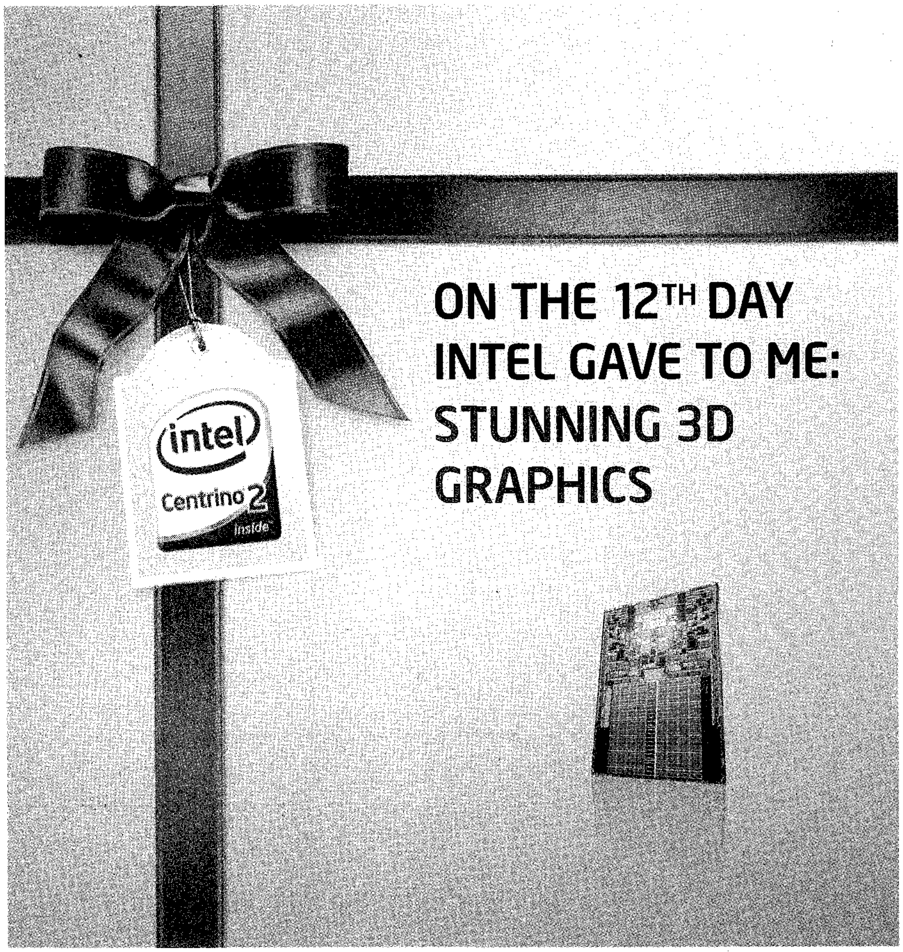
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HE REMEMBERS

No film starts more entrancingly than "Amarcord." Federico Fellini, returning to his native Rimini, catches it precisely at the vernal moment: the toll of a church bell, as bright and clear as the sky, through which puffballs of thistledown drift, signalling the end of winter. "Affection is even more important than love," says Gradisca (Magali Noël), the town favorite, adored from a distance by its youths, whose education—sentimental, scholastic, erotic, and political—is just one of the frames through which Fellini recalls the nineteen-thirties. Seasons make do for plots; faces, curves, and gestures serve up instant characters; epiphanies descend from nowhere, like the celebrated peacock in the snow. When the film opened, in 1973, some viewers criticized its view of Fascist enthusiasm as just one more natural folly of the period; even Gradisca longs to touch a visiting official. The new print, showing at Film Forum Dec. 3-16, will be a chance to revisit that debate—to ask whether affection can blur as well as compel.

—*Anthony Lane*





her first husband, Wang Jingchao, were journalists and devoted socialists, who were nonetheless subjected to fearsome "struggle sessions," publicly denounced and humiliated, separated from their young sons, and sent to labor camps—from which Wang Jingchao did not emerge alive. Fengming describes horrific privations as well as lifesaving acts of kindness, painfully recalls her family's devastation, and tells how she put her life back together again and again. The film has a moral authority similar to that of the Holocaust documentary "Shoah," to which it ingeniously alludes. The long first shot, the only one set outdoors, follows Fengming as she walks—silently—home. In China, which (unlike Germany) is still ruled by the same party that committed the crimes being recounted, the truth, Wang Bing suggests, can still not be spoken in public; his film brilliantly, bravely brings that silence to light. In Mandarin.—*Richard Brody* (Anthology Film Archives; Dec. 5-7.)

FOUR CHRISTMASES
Talented actors left to run on autopilot can't enliven this schematic seasonal romantic comedy's predictable servings of high jinks and sentiment. Vince Vaughn and Reese Witherspoon star as Brad and Kate, a fun-loving bourgeois couple from San Francisco who are resistant to marriage and other obligations. When a cancelled flight thwarts their planned holiday escape to Fiji, they get stuck doing a Christmas Day round of their divorced parents' quartet of homes. Revelations abound as, in the flat script's one clever touch, unconfessed secrets from the lovers' pasts reëmerge to suggest unsuspected fault lines in their relationship. But the tone fluctuates between forced uproar and soft soap, the stars have little chemistry, and the fine supporting cast (including Robert Duvall and Sissy Spacek, as Brad's parents, and Mary Steenburgen and Jon Voight, as Kate's) isn't given any footing to cling to. But one brief sequence of visual comedy, a pure, mechanistic slapstick number worthy of Mack Sennett, may have you laughing so hard you'll miss half of it, and Patrick Van Horn does a good turn as Brad's onetime best friend, who is now his mother's boyfriend. Directed by Seth Gordon.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

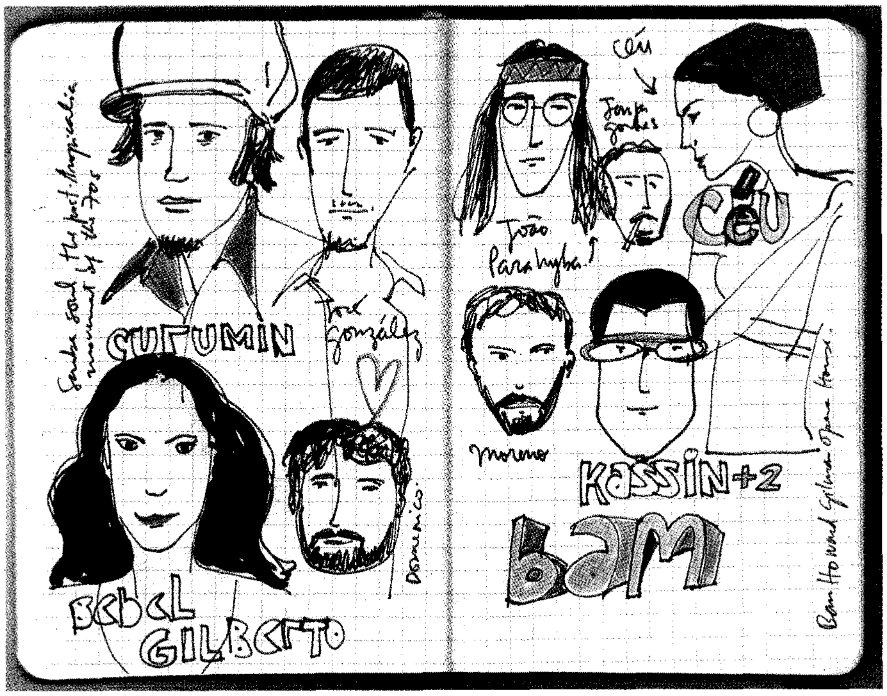
HAPPY-GO-LUCKY
Poppy (Sally Hawkins), the single, thirty-year-old London schoolteacher in Mike Leigh's comedy, bounces on a trampoline after school, but she doesn't need much of a lift—she's already airborne. Is possession of the happiness gene enough to get you through life without harm? Or, putting it less grandly, can a woman as cheerful as Poppy serve as the protagonist of a full-length movie? Leigh, who directs with a carefree assurance (after much rehearsal with the actors), matches his heroine against a series of adversaries—an iron-willed flamenco dancer, a bully boy in her class, a driving instructor (Eddie Marsan) who is so rule-bound that he's choking with rage—all of whom try to overcome unhappiness by behaving as aggressively or living as rigidly as possible. The movie is not an argument for chaos; it's an argument for making one's way through life with a relaxed will and an open heart. With Alexis Zegerman as Poppy's dyspeptic roommate.—*David Denby* (10/13/08) (In wide release.)

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL 3: SENIOR YEAR
For the first time, the goings on at East High, that noted hotbed of voluptuous tension and intellectual clout, are visible on the big screen. Until now, the franchise has stayed within the bounds of the Disney Channel, and this third installment, directed by Kenny Ortega, cleaves to established guidelines. The young scholars still carry books around, for instance, in preference to reading them. Troy (Zac Efron) still loves Gabriella (Vanessa Hudgens) with a passion so unbridled that they are allowed to sit side by side on a hammock. He even invites her up into his tree house. But prom night beckons, as does the prospect of college, not to mention the end-of-year dramatic production: a chance for Chad (Corbin Bleu), Sharpay (Ashley Tisdale), Kelsi (Olesya Rulin), and the other regulars to parade their extravagant gifts. Though the plot feels weirdly scrappy and casual, there is a pleas-

ing generosity to the way in which Ortega crams in as many songs as possible, often on the flimsiest of pretexts; if one tune slips from your memory before the next arrives, that's part of the deal. Much less forgettable is Ryan (Lucas Grabeel), the school choreographer, who dreams of Juilliard and dresses like a Nazi golfer.—*A.L.* (11/3/08) (In wide release.)

I'VE LOVED YOU SO LONG

As Juliette, Kristin Scott Thomas is first seen in closeup without makeup, her hair lustreless, her expression blank but tense. Juliette has completed a prison sentence of fifteen years for committing the unimaginable crime of murdering her six-year-old son. Her kid sister, Léa (Elsa Zylberstein), a literature professor at a university in Nancy, nervously lets her into her own family, where Juliette remains in an uneasy state of semi-silence. Written and directed by the novelist Philippe Claudel, the movie asks whether anyone who has done something so extreme can be welcomed back into the human community. And does she *want* to be welcomed back? Claudel is an observant man, he has commanded a large (and, to us, unfamiliar) cast of actors to gather around his star, and he dramatizes Juliette's slow reawakening with an infinite number of small, sharply etched details. The secrets that are finally revealed about the crime are unsatisfying—one feels a little cheated—but they have the curious effect of making one want to see the movie again in order to study Scott Thomas's performance. In French.—*D.D.* (11/10/08) (In wide release.)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THE LOST WORLD

The key to the charm of Arthur Conan Doyle's pioneer sci-fi adventure (the acknowledged ancestor of "Jurassic Park" and its sequel, also called "The Lost World") is that he found a central character as dynamic as his dinosaurs: the bloody-minded professor George Edward Challenger, the prototype of the cantankerous "action intellectual" in pop fiction. Wallace Beery is superbly blustery in this boldly designed 1925 silent version of Challenger's trip to an Amazon plateau that time forgot. The director, Harry Hoyt, adroitly mixes live creatures (such as a couple of cute spectacled bears) into the jungle journey, and even when Challenger and his fellow-explorers confront ape-men in disastrous makeup the cast (including Bessie Love, Lewis Stone, and Lloyd Hughes) maintains the appropriate awe and fright. The prehistoric giants of the special-effects master Willis O'Brien are more poetically primordial than today's computer-generated reptiles. It's as if they weren't made by hand, but by fang and claw.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Dec. 5.)

MILK

Gus Van Sant's vibrantly entertaining bio-pic recreates, without starchiness, the San Francisco life of the gay activist and politician Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), who was assassinated in 1978, along with Mayor George Moscone, by a fellow-politician, the family-values conservative Dan White (Josh Brolin). The righteous march of events is warmed by the banter, the casual sex, and the candor of the gay milieu in the giddy seventies, the period just before AIDS, when life was free and easy. Much of the time, Penn keeps his voice down, but the fervor and humor are there in the most offhanded moments. Without ostentation, he creates a new body, a new temperament: he loosens his neck and shoulders and swivels his head; his smile is enormous and all-embracing; he holds an elbow out and pumps a forearm up and down like a semaphore as Harvey speaks in public. Josh Brolin, a slab of hair lying low across his forehead, gives White a brick-headed, baffled manner, a tormented neediness. In the filmmakers' interpretation, there's a suggestion that White suffered from murderously repressed homosexuality. With James Franco, Emile Hirsch, Diego Luna, and Alison Pill.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In limited release.)

QUANTUM OF SOLACE

The twenty-second James Bond film is a strange affair. The hero is still hopping the globe in the quest to unravel a mysterious organization, as he used to do in the days of SMERSH. The difference, these days, is that none of it, not even the hopping, seems like fun. In the role of 007, Daniel Craig is brutish, joyless, and obsessive; you can't take your eyes off him, but you wonder if the punishment that he metes out is really directed at himself. He doesn't eat, he drinks to kill pain, and he manages to spend half the movie in the company of the ravishing Camille (Olga Kurylenko) without getting anywhere near a bed. His official mission is to pursue Dominic Greene (Mathieu Amalric), who is—wait for it—fast becoming a leading figure in South American water-storage circles. But the real mission, nurtured in Bond's wounded heart, is to avenge the death of Vesper Lynd, who won his love in "Casino Royale." The director, Marc Forster, whips us from one savage set piece to the next, regardless of logical connection, and the result can be read as the toughest and most expensive art-house film of the year. With Gemma Arterton, who lights up the action, all too briefly, as a fellow British spy.—*A.L.* (11/17/08) (In wide release.)

RACHEL GETTING MARRIED

The new Jonathan Demme film is one of his slighter and more oddball affairs. It stars Anne Hathaway as Kym, who leaves rehab—where she is being treated for drug addiction—to attend the wedding of her sister Rachel (Rosemarie DeWitt). This takes place at the family home in Connecticut, which has become, for the occasion, a multiethnic menagerie of liberal optimists, many bearing musical instruments. Not surprisingly, the festive air is spoiled by the intrusion of Kym, who feels constrained by her protective father (Bill Irwin) and then flashes into fearsome combat with her mother (Debra Winger). The movie is too long, and often wearying to watch, taking its visual cues from the unappeasable restlessness of the heroine. Yet the scene in which she is welcomed home, after a car accident, to be bathed and consoled by her sister without a word has a real, if exhausted, tenderness; the smarting emotions on show here are seldom contrived, and anyone versed in family conflict—that is, anyone with a family—will flinch at those moments when Demme cuts close to the bone.—*A.L.* (10/6/08) (In wide release.)

ROLE MODELS

Paul Rudd is mainly the straight man in this wan, sentimental, occasionally very funny comedy. He and Seann William Scott star as a pair of dead-end marketers shilling an energy drink to high-school students. His frustration and anger lead to a run-in with the law that gets them both sentenced to community service with a Big Brothers-like organization—and, not surprisingly, these immature adults ultimately learn to grow up by helping children in need. Most of the comedy comes from a stunning array of supporting comedians from the Judd Apatow stable (especially Christopher Mintz-Plasse, from "Superbad"), who are turned loose and allowed to riff freely, as well as from an outrageous child, Bobb'e J. Thompson, who never becomes cloying. Unfortunately, the humor repeatedly strikes the same few notes and is exhausted long before the warmhearted ending. Poor Elizabeth Banks, as a lawyer and beleaguered fiancée, once again plays a responsible mother surrogate; she and Rudd both need some hard-edged drama to expand their intelligent, lively personae. Directed by David Wain.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE

An eighteen-year-old Muslim tea-boy named Jamal (Dev Patel), born and raised in the poverty of Mumbai, teeters on the verge of fame and fortune. A nation awaits. Such is the old-fashioned, sentimental cliffhanger to which the screenwriter Simon Beaufoy and the director Danny Boyle have, with unembarrassed drive, committed themselves. Jamal is a contestant on the Indian edition of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?," and the suspicion of the police—who, in an ill-judged prelude to the story, hold and torture him—is that he must have cheated. His response is that experience alone, whether wretched or comic, has by chance furnished him with the correct answers, and the bulk of the film, constructed from flashbacks, proves his point. The style, seen previously in "City of God" and other movies, is what you might call urban-manic: heated performances, even hotter colors, and camerawork that vies with the editing for nerve and speed. The lad at the center of it all is actually on the dull side, but the energy around him—not least in the dance sequence over the final credits—is difficult to resist.—*A.L.* (11/24/08) (In wide release.)

SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK

The screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, who was responsible for "Adaptation," "Being John Malkovich," and other enlivening puzzles, has now directed a film of his own. Philip Seymour Hoffman plays Caden Cotard, who starts off running a small theatre company in Schenectady, and, following a sumptuous grant from the MacArthur Foundation, ends up spending decades on an altogether grander project—constructing a chunk of alternative city within New York, in which countless characters go about their scripted lives. It is an amazing conceit, but that, unfortunately, is more or less what it remains: a conceit, which, having taken half the film to get moving, then grows increasingly hard to grasp as a practical enterprise, and even harder to believe in. Figures from Caden's world are represented, within his magnum opus, by hired actors: thus, his colleague Hazel (Samantha Morton), for whom he has an enduring affection, is played by Tammy (Emily Watson), and Caden himself by Sammy (Tom Noonan). As a re-

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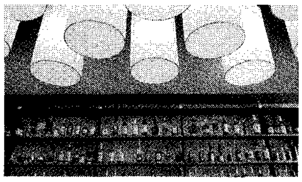
*Subject to state and local laws. Must be of legal drinking age. ©2008 Hilton Hotels Corporation. 36USC220506 flection on the human eagerness to tell tales about ourselves, and to make good on our disappointments through art, Kaufman's movie has fine flashes of black humor, and there is no mistaking the tenderness in the performances of Morton, Watson, and, later on, Dianne Wiest; but the over-all result is a long slog, and the customary brightness of the writer's wit feels ever more clouded by the surrounding gloom. With Catherine Keener, as Caden's weary wife, and Hope Davis, as their counsellor.—*A.L.* (11/3/08) (In wide release.)

TABLES FOR TWO
CHAR NO. 4



NATALIE MATUTSCHOVSKY

196 Smith St., Brooklyn (718-643-2106)—Char No. 4, in Cobble Hill, belongs to the lately fashionable Southern genus. Witness the pervasive campfire scent from the basement smoker, the Texan chef (Matt Greco), and the service—as unhurried and welcoming as a drawl. But taxonomists may argue whether the place constitutes a restaurant, or merely a sophisticated bourbon showcase that happens to serve food. Hundreds of illuminated bottles of whiskey (mostly bourbon) reach to the ceiling behind the bar, and light fixtures in the shape of bourbon barrels cast a warm whiskey glow. The name itself—Char No. 4—refers to the highest degree of charring such barrels receive before the aging process. As might be expected, the cocktails are handled with care: the Homerun, if not quite the triumph its name implies, is refreshingly mature for a drink mixed with pineapple juice, and the addition of bourbon to a Bloody Mary affords a pleasant brown-sugar note. The food is not an afterthought, exactly, but if you happen to neglect your dinner plans after a third pour of Pappy Van Winkle, no one will pay it too much mind.

If you do make it to a booth, you'll find that the taxonomical conundrums extend to the menu. The eggs Benedict could pass for biscuits and gravy; the clam chowder is as texturally homogeneous as a bisque; the dandelion greens cooked with applesauce wind up tasting like pie. The shrimp and grits, prettily presented, are overwhelmed by a pungent scallion garnish. Yet there are some notable successes. Pair the house-cured bacon—as thick as a wallet—with the cornflake-crusted oysters and you might develop a new respect for breakfast foods. Honey-roasted chicken becomes exquisitely tender in the smoker. Perhaps most satisfying of all is a dish of butter-pecan ice cream drenched in—what else?—bourbon. The simple distillation of elemental flavors (sweet, salty, bitter) is the apotheosis of honest Southern eating.

Even so, if you find yourself sharing a booth with a Waffle House enthusiast, you may confront the inevitable question: "Is this really better than what you'd get in a diner?" Maybe not, but does it need to be? On a recent afternoon, the Chicago chef Grant Achatz, finishing brunch at a neighboring table, shrugged and smiled when asked for his informed opinion. "It was good," he said. When it comes to comfort food, sometimes good is good enough. (Open weekdays for dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $14-$22.)

—*Lila Byock*

TWILIGHT
Isabella Swan (Kristen Stewart), a lovely, slender, self-possessed high-school junior, moves to a new school in rainy Washington State and sees a tall, inordinately pale boy, Edward Cullen (the square-jawed Robert Pattinson), glowering at her in despair. He wants her, but he cannot give way to desire. Edward, it turns out, is a vampire, but a very moral one, thirsty yet ascetic; he will drink only animal blood, he tells her, and she falls completely in love with him. In some ways, the scrupulous young man is an ideal lover: after all, many teen-age girls don't want intercourse; they want romance, and here is a boy with superhuman powers who is nevertheless sweet to his girl and protects her from harm without demanding anything in return but the chance to adore her. The director, Catherine Hardwicke ("Thirteen"), oversees some special effects that look a little cheesy, though the sunless Northwest, thick with mountain forests, is gloomily magnificent. Much of the time, Hardwick keeps the camera close to the chaste lovers. For teens, it's blissful madness—an abstinence fable that's sexier than sex.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In wide release.)

ZACK AND MIRI MAKE A PORNO
It begins with church bells ringing in mournful disapproval of the filth that is about to be set before us. Kevin Smith, the eternally blasphemous boy from New Jersey, takes two of his going-nowhere-fast characters—Zack (Seth Rogen) and Miri (Elizabeth Banks), friends since high school and now roommates suffering through the chilly boredom of a Pittsburgh winter—and turns them into porn stars and producers. They assemble a ragtag cast and set to work, after hours, in a Starbucks-like café where Zack is a barista. Alas, the jokes are no more than occasionally funny. As a parodist, Smith doesn't have much room to maneuver. He can only make even sillier the kind of material that, at the plot level, is already hapless—the mailman at the housewife's door, the sudden urge to unzip, the simulated joy. In classic American fashion, the talk is dirtier than the sex. Through it all, Smith attempts to stage a tender love story—Rogen, bearded and then clean-shaven, looks at the lovely Banks like a beatific bull.—*D.D.* (11/10/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BOLT: In wide release. **THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS:** In wide release. **MADAGASCAR: ESCAPE 2 AFRICA:** In wide release. **SOUL MEN:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. Dec. 4 at 7:30: "Otto Klemperer's Journey Through His Times" (1984, Philo Bregstein; in German). ♦ Dec. 5 at 7 and Dec. 6-7 at 3 and 7: "Fengming: A Chinese Memoir" (†). ♦ Through Dec. 10: The African Diaspora Film Festival. For program information, visit www.nyadff.org.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—New Czech films. All films are in Czech unless otherwise noted. Dec. 3 at 7:30: "The Country Teacher" (2008, Bohdan Sláma). ♦ Dec. 4 at 7:30 and 9:45: "Of Parents and Children" (2008, Vladimír Michálek). ♦ Dec. 5 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Night Owls" (2008, Michaela Pavlátová). ♦ Dec. 6 at 2 and 6:50: "Empties" (2007, Jan Svěrák). ♦ Dec. 6 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Lost Holiday" (2007, Lucie Králová). ♦ Dec. 7 at 2 and 6:50: "Teddy Bear" (2007, Jan Hřebejk). ♦ Dec. 7 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Something Like Happiness" (2005, Sláma). ♦ A tribute to Paul Newman. Dec. 8 at 6:50: "The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds" (1972, Newman). ♦ Dec. 8 at 9:15: "Slap Shot" (1977, George Roy Hill). ♦ Dec. 9 at 6 and 9: "Torn Curtain" (1966, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ Dec. 11 at 6 and 9: "The Hustler" (1961, Robert Rossen).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Dec. 3-16 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Amarcord" (1973, Federico Fellini; in Italian and Greek).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Refracted Light: The Films of Quinto and Jean-Gabriel Albicocco." Dec. 9 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "The Wanderer" (1967, Jean-Gabriel Albicocco; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—The films of Ingmar Bergman. Dec. 5-11 at 11 A.M.: "Fanny and Alexander," the original uncut version (1982, Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Dec. 5-6: "The Lost Boys" (1987, Joel Schumacher). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Dec. 9 at 8: "The Autobiography of Richard Leacock," a presentation by the filmmaker of clips from throughout his career.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Batiste Madalena and the Cinema of the 1920s." Dec. 3 at 1:30: Short-film program, including an excerpt from "Beggar on Horseback" (1925, James Cruze; silent). ♦ Dec. 4 at 1:30: "The Cossacks" (1928, George Hill; silent). ♦ Dec. 5 at 1:30: "The Lost World" (†). ♦ "Looking at Music." Dec. 3 and Dec. 6 at 6: "The Velvet Underground" (1966, Andy Warhol). ♦ Dec. 5 at 7: "Wild Combination: A Portrait of Arthur Russell" (2008, Matt Wolf). ♦ "The Contenders." Dec. 3 at 7: "Milk" (†). ♦ Dec. 6 at 7:30: "A Girl Cut in Two" (2007, Claude Chabrol; in French). ♦ Dec. 6 at 8:15 and Dec. 7 at 5: "The Pool" (2007, Chris Smith). ♦ The films of Ferzan Ozpetek. Except where noted, all films are in Italian. Dec. 4 at 7: "His Secret Life" (2001). ♦ Dec. 5 at 6: "A Perfect Day" (2008). ♦ Dec. 5 at 8:15: "Facing Windows" (2003). ♦ Dec. 6 at 3: "Steam: The Turkish Bath" (1997; in Italian and Turkish). ♦ Dec. 6 at 5: "Sacred Heart" (2005). ♦ Dec. 7 at 3: "Harem" (1999; in Turkish and Italian). ♦ Dec. 7 at 5: "Saturn in Opposition" (2007). ♦ A tribute to Melvin Van Peebles. Dec. 6 at 3: "Confessionsofa Ex-Doofus-ItchyFooted Mutha" (2008). ♦ Special presentation. Dec. 8 at 6: Vlada Petric discusses the work of Slavko Vorkapich. ♦ "Modern Mondays." Dec. 8 at 7: "Monument of Sugar: How to Use Artistic Means to Elude Trade Barriers" (2007, Lonnie van Brummelen).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Dec. 5 at 9:30: "Mr. Klein" (1976, Joseph Losey; in French), introduced by Tyne Daly.

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—Special screenings. Dec. 3 at 7: "Around the World with Joseph Stiglitz" (2008, Jacques Sarasin). ♦ Dec. 4 at 7: "Short Cuts" (1993, Robert Altman). ♦ "Spanish Cinema Now." All films are in Spanish. Dec. 5 at 7 and Dec. 6 at 6:45: "Chef's Special" (2008, Nacho G. Velilla). ♦ Dec. 5 at 9:30 and Dec. 9 at 1:30: "Before the Fall, aka 3 Days" (2008, F. Javier Gutiérrez). ♦ Dec. 6 at 4:30 and Dec. 8 at 2: "Pretexts" (2008, Silvia Munt). ♦ Dec. 6 at 9:30: "Timecrimes" (2007, Nacho Vigalondo). ♦ Dec. 7 at 6: "[REC]" (2007, Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza). ♦ Dec. 7 at 8:30 and Dec. 8 at 4: "Rated-R" (2008, Dunia Ayaso and Félix Sabroso). ♦ Dec. 8 at 6:20: "Everyone's Invited" (2008, Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón). ♦ Dec. 8 at 8:30: "One-Armed Trick" (2008, Santiago Zannou). ♦ Dec. 9 at 3:30: "My Father's House" (2008, Gorka Merchán). ♦ "Cinematic Opera/Operatic Cinema." Dec. 7 at 2: "The Magic Flute" (1975, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ In première. Dec. 9 at 7: "The Wrestler" (2008, Darren Aronofsky).

READINGS AND TALKS

"THE DINNER PARTY"
The chef Dan Barber (of Blue Hill and Blue Hill at Stone Barns) and the pastry chef Will Goldfarb

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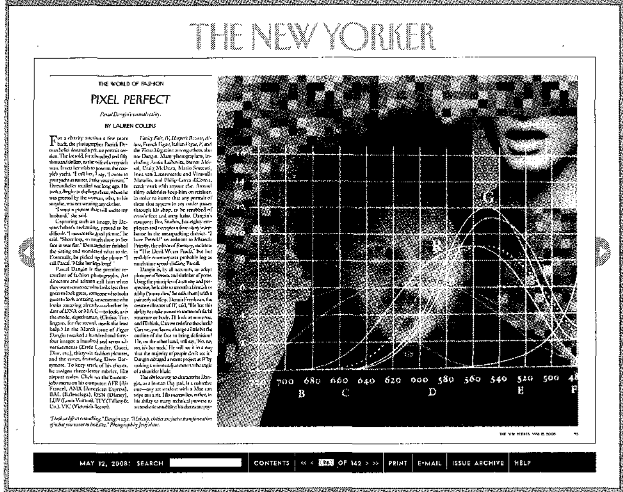

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BY LAUREN COLLINS

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join the partners in the polymorphous design firm Avroko (the founders and proprietors of the restaurants Public and Double Crown, among other endeavors) and Matteo Bologna (who designed the graphics for Balthazar and the Standard Hotels chain) to consider the relationship between eating and appearances. Cocktails and snacks will be served. (The Great Hall, Cooper Union, 7 E. 7th St. For more information, visit www.aigany.org. Dec. 3 at 6:30.)

MAIRA KALMAN
The author, illustrator, and contributor to this magazine (she co-created the "New Yorkistan" cover of the Dec. 10, 2001, issue) talks about her work. (Christie's, 20 Rockefeller Plaza. For reservations, which are required, call 212-988-7700, ext. 210. Dec. 4 at 6:30.)

IDLEWILD BOOKS
The online journal *Words Without Borders* presents the writer Francisco Goldman and the translator Natasha Wimmer, who will discuss the Chilean author Robert Bolaño's posthumous novel, "2666," which Wimmer translated. (12 W. 19th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 4 at 7.)

JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH
The poets Robert Pinsky (who was the United States' Poet Laureate from 1997 to 2000), Tom Sleigh, and Rachel Dewoskin read from their work. (55 Washington Sq. S. 212-255-7075. Dec. 4 at 7.)

ANNE CARSON
The poet presents the première of two works, "Stacks" and "Bracko," incorporating language, dance, and sculpture. They were created in collaboration with the choreographers Jonah Bokaer and Rashaun Mitchell and the sculptor Peter Cole. (See Dance.) (Skirball Center, New York University, 566 LaGuardia Pl., at Washington Sq. S. 212-352-3101. Dec. 4 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

GRANDE DAME
The Mary A. Whalen is a hundred-and-seventy-two-foot-long oil tanker that spent much of its life delivering fuel up and down the East Coast. After the tanker was taken out of service, in 1993, it functioned as a dock and an office in the Erie Basin Bargeport, in Red Hook, but it has since become the home of a nonprofit group called Portside New York, which as part of its mission to connect New Yorkers with the waterfront also uses it as a performance space. The tanker is now seventy years old, and Portside New York is throwing her a party, complete with visiting tugs and workboats, tours of the ship, music, and, of course, cake. (Pier 11, Atlantic Basin, Red Hook. For more information, visit www.portsidenewyork.org. Dec. 6, from 11 to 5.)

INDEPENDENT AND SMALL PRESS BOOK FAIR
Since 1988, small publishers have been gathering annually to display their wares and talk shop. This year, more than a hundred independent presses are participating, and the many free public readings and events range from discussions on how to publish your own book to a "literary quiz smackdown" between *New York Review of Books* staff members and literary bloggers. (New York Center for Independent Publishing, the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, 20 W. 44th St. Dec. 6-7. For more information, visit www.nycip.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Christie's begins the week (on Dec. 3) with a sale of sporting art—equine portraits, racing paintings, depictions of the hunt—led by Sir Alfred J. Munnings's stately portrait atop a gray mare, "F. H. Prince and the Pau Foxhounds." There's an offering of maritime art later the same day, which contains no less than fifteen oils and watercolors by the British maritime master Montague Dawson. In an auction of American art (Dec. 4), Childe Hassam is represented by two characteristically domesticated, painterly visions of Fifth Avenue, while the sale's top lot, Winslow Homer's "After the Rain, Prouts Neck," is an elegiac scene set in a sumptuous yet grim Maine landscape. The following morning (Dec. 5) is devoted to rare books and manuscripts, featuring an engraving of a panoramic view of Philadelphia by Scull and Heap from 1754. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** auction of American art (Dec. 3), which contains works by Winslow Homer, Georgia O'Keeffe, Norman Rockwell, and John Singer Sargent (his lighthearted watercolor "Summer on the Giudecca"), features several clusters of works from private collections. As at Christie's, images of dogs and horses predominate at the sale of sporting art (Dec. 5), which also incorporates maritime paintings by Montague Dawson and others; it is followed by a two-part sale of jewelry (Dec. 9). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ The British auctioneer **Bloomsbury** offers a private collection of Russian literature and art (Dec. 4), with an emphasis on tsarist Russia and the twentieth-century avant-garde, including Benois's delightful 1904 children's book, "An Alphabet in Pictures." (6 W. 48th St. 212-719-1000.)

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Bull riders at Madison Square Garden.

PATRICK LEGER

ON THE HORIZON

DANCE
MONSOON DREAMS
Dec. 11-20

The German choreographer Pina Bausch brings her most recent multicultural dance-theatre fantasy, "Bamboo Blues," to BAM, where it will have its American première and close this year's Next Wave Festival. Inspired by Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal company's extended travels in India, in 2006, "Bamboo Blues" is an ode to the country's rhythms, culture, and gestural language, and reveals Bausch's softer side. (718-636-4100.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCENTRIC CAROLS
Dec. 21-22

Those who like their holiday cheer edgy but classy can head to the Guggenheim Museum's rotunda, where George Steel will conduct a festive free program with the Vox Vocal Ensemble. (www.guggenheim.org.)

MOVIES
FRANTIC ANTICS
Dec. 24-Jan. 1

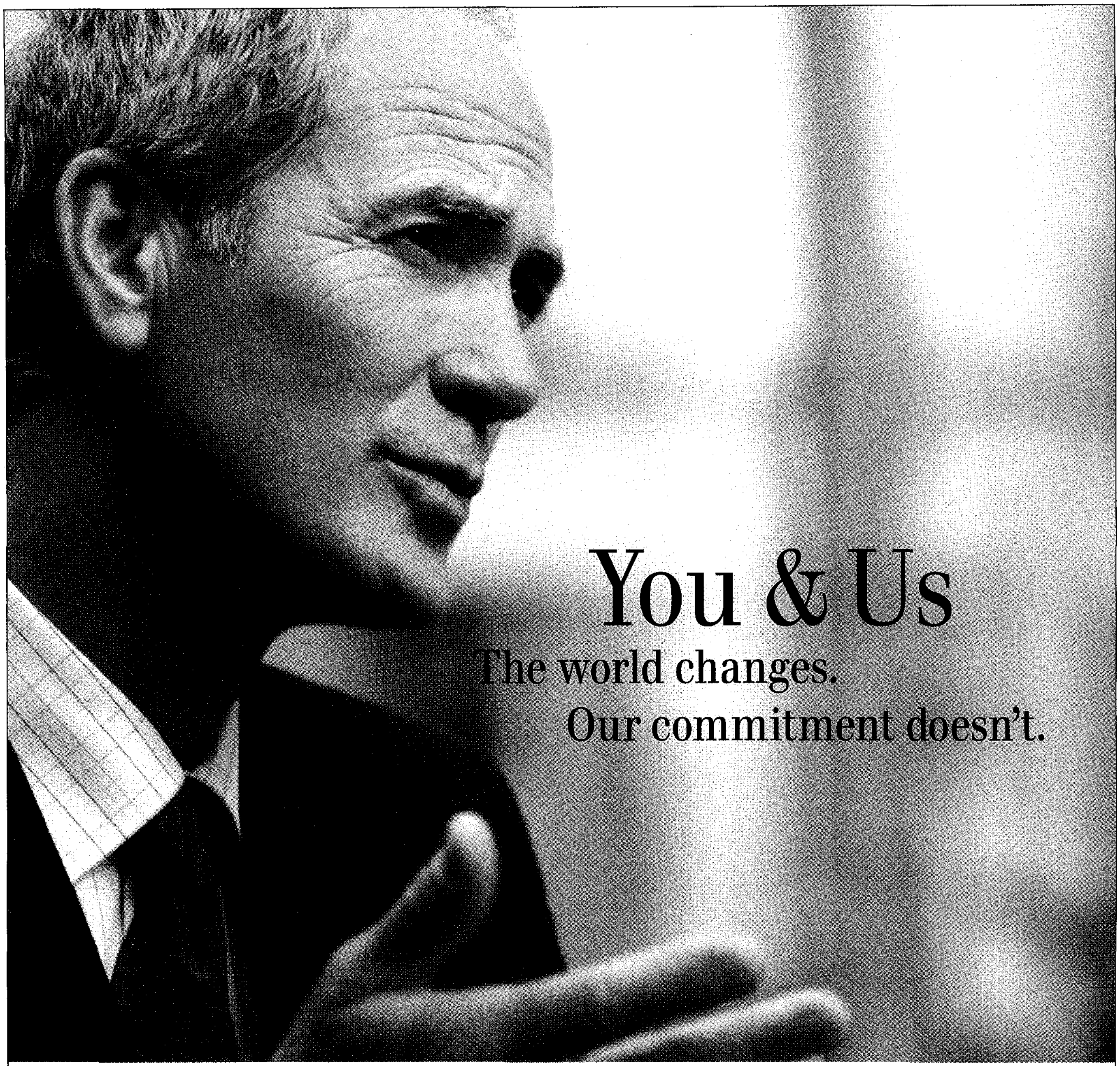
As a screenwriter, Preston Sturges crafted romantic comedies and farces. As a director, he upped the ante in ribaldry, satire, and pinball-rapid lunacy, as seen in such comedies as "The Miracle of Morgan's Creek," "Unfaithfully Yours," and "Sullivan's Travels." These and other Sturges classics are featured in Film Forum's mini-retrospective. (212-727-8110.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
THE BUCK STOPS HERE
Jan. 9-11

Bulls may be scarce on Wall Street, but real live ones will come to Madison Square Garden next month, when forty-five professional bull riders compete in an invitational tournament. Seven hundred pounds of dirt will cover the Garden's floor for the occasion. (212-307-7171.)

ART
PROJECT RUNWAY
Jan. 16-May 3

The International Center of Photography kicks off its yearlong series of shows about the intersection of fashion and photography with "Edward Steichen: In High Fashion," the first exhibition to seriously consider the artist's work for *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, and other publications. (212-857-0000.)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FROM THE NOBEL PRIZE-WINNING
AUTHOR OF *BELOVED*

Toni Morrison

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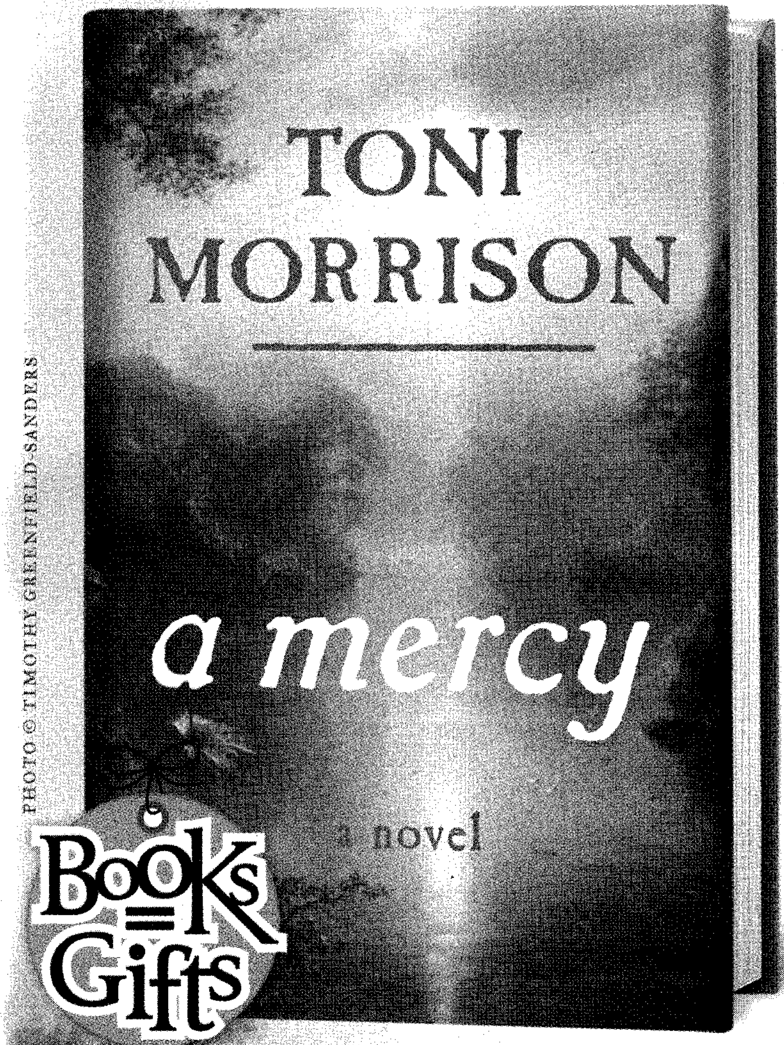

"A miraculous tale of sorrow and beauty"
—Pam Houston, O MAGAZINE

"Luminous...Morrison lavishes some of her best writing in years on this pre-revolutionary world, making it so luminous and complex."
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"A work of poetry and intelligence"
—Judith Freeman, LOS ANGELES TIMES

"Astonishing"
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

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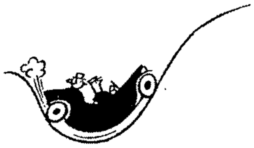

The Secretary of Transportation's report to Congress begins on a dark note. "Over the past year, the domestic auto industry has experienced sharply reduced sales and profitability, large indefinite layoffs, and increased market penetration by imports," it states. "The shift in consumer preferences towards smaller, more fuel-efficient passenger cars and light trucks . . . appears to be permanent, and the industry will spend massive amounts of money to retool to produce the motor vehicles that the public now wants." The revenue to pay for this retooling, though, will have to come from sales of just the sort of cars that the public is no longer buying—a situation, the report observes, bound to produce "financial strain."

"To improve the overall future prospects for the domestic motor vehicle manufacturers, a quality and price competitive motor vehicle must be produced," the report warns. "If this is not accomplished, the long term outlook for the industry is bleak."

The Secretary's report was delivered to Congress in 1980, a year after what may soon become known as the first Chrysler bailout. Depending on how you look at things, the report was either wrong—three years later, Chrysler returned to profitability—or prescient.

Last month, when the chief executives of the Big Three flew to Washington in their corporate jets to plead for public money, the result was embarrassing on almost every level. During two days of congressional hearings, the C.E.O.s were unable to answer the most basic questions, such as how they had arrived at the sum they were asking for—twenty-five billion dollars—or why it would be better to give it to them rather than to their customers, or whether, if they got it, it would be enough to keep them solvent. The three didn't seem to think it necessary to present Congress with any documentation showing how they would spend the money, and they were sent back to Detroit like delinquent schoolboys. "Until they show us the plan, we cannot show them the money," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told reporters. That day, Ford's stock price sank to a low of $1.01. "You want fries with that?" the *Times*' Timothy Egan asked.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The challenge facing the Big Three as they return to Washington, presumably this week, is formidable. They have tried to cast themselves as victims, suffering from the mistakes of others, but this is a hard act to pull off.

"They are seeking treatment for wounds that, I believe, to a large extent were self-inflicted," Senator Christopher Dodd, of Connecticut, the chairman of the banking committee and a proponent of a bailout, observed. Senator Carl Levin, of Michigan, one of the industry's staunchest supporters, pointed to the companies' habit of "paying their executives and their workers too much," to their uneven quality record, and to their aversion to innovation. "Blame them if you want," he said. By the end of the second day of hearings, lawmakers were openly taunting the C.E.O.s. Representative Peter Roskam, of Illinois, asked the three if, in return for federal assistance, they would be willing to reduce their salaries to a dollar a year.

"I don't have a position on that today," G.M.'s Rick Wagoner said.

"I think I'm O.K. where I am,"

Ford's Alan Mulally responded. (In 2007, Mulally's compensation ran to nearly twenty-two million dollars.)

Barack Obama, thanks to his resignation from the Senate, will not have to vote on any bailout package that makes it to the floor. So far, at least, whenever he has been asked for his position, he has been noncommittal. On the one hand, he has called the carmakers "the backbone of American manufacturing" and said that "we need to provide assistance" to them; on the other, he has stated, "We can't just write a blank check to the auto industry."

But even though he's between offices, the situation doesn't leave Obama—the champion of "change we can believe in"—off the hook. If the automakers' difficulties can be traced to a single, essential failure, it is their belief that they could avoid change. This is evident in their management structure, their labor contracts, and, most consequentially, their cars. For the past thirty years, the Big Three have been promising one hyper-efficient vehicle after another—the electric car, the "super car," the hydrogen car—only to produce bigger and bigger gas guzzlers. (It was while the carmakers were supposedly working together, and with a billion dollars of federal money, to create a "new generation of vehicles" that G.M. purchased the rights to the Hummer.) The only compelling argument the companies can make at this late date—if a man strapped with explosives can be said to be making an argument—is that they will not suffer alone.

"What would it mean if the domestic industry were allowed to fail?" G.M.'s Wagoner asked last month. "The cost would be catastrophic. . . . That's why this is all about a lot more than just Detroit." Together, the Big Three employ some two hundred and fifty thousand people, and, as the automakers correctly point out, millions of other Americans—from the machinist at the tire factory to the waitress at the corner bar—indirectly depend on them for jobs. Were these jobs to be lost, the effect would ripple out through the economy, producing what Paul Krugman, on MSNBC, recently called "a huge anti-stimulus program at exactly the wrong moment."

It would, of course, be foolish to allow the American economy to collapse in order to make a point. And it's possible to conclude that the Big Three deserve on every front to fail and still decide to rescue them. But such a decision will itself be a form of temporizing, and will only pass the problems on to the next Administration. Real change—as opposed to the kind in slogans—is hard and, by definition, disruptive. If Obama has any intention of fulfilling his campaign promises, sooner or later he's going to have to face up to that.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

DEPT. OF VISUALIZATION

THE PITS

Walking or riding along the avenues, you can imagine the storefronts without tenants. Bank branches, juice bars, shops selling electronics and scarves: all of them gone, unable to make the rent, and the landlords, verging on default, unable to lure replacements. It's a feasible scenario, if you consider the consumer-confidence and consumer-price indices, the wealth destruction, all the layoffs and trickle-down effects, and the allegedly unrelated possibility, as the *Times* reported last week, that "something funny is happening on the dark side of the universe." ("A better and more enticing explanation for the excess is that the particles are being spit out of the fireballs created by dark matter particles colliding and annihilating one another in space"—and here we were blaming Alan Greenspan.) A friend who worked in Southeast Asia in the nineteen-nineties, during the recession there, recalls visiting Bangkok and Jakarta to see the abandoned high-rises of the preceding economic boom. He found ranges of half-finished buildings, derelict superstructures occupied by tent shanties and with squatters gathered around fires. It may be no great leap from there to a vision here of burning garbage cans and jerry-rigged cardboard in Washington Mutual's cashless vestibules or the bare aisles of Circuit City.

"What will it look like?" is a question of the hour, as people try to visualize the ways in which life will change in New York as a result of the financial and economic crisis. In the mind's eye, we tend to populate our recessionary streets with squad cars painted green, cat's-eyed ambulances, and other anachronisms—"Fort Apache, the Bronx: The Remake." But, really, the city will probably just look the way it does now. After an extraordinary era of construction and renovation, demolition and replacement, there will almost certainly come a long period in which little to nothing gets built. Putting aside the long-discussed public projects that are endangered or doomed (the Second Avenue Subway, the West Side Railyards, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Moynihan Station, etc.), dozens of private undertakings have stalled or died. The calls go out to the architects: pencils down. We have inherited, from the good years, a glut of housing, almost all of it of the unaffordable kind—condos galore—and an increase in office space amid a sudden, steep decrease in the need for it. Throw in the high cost, or total unavailability, of capital, owing to the credit freeze, and you have a New York that may be frozen in time. The skyline, which has been very dynamic recently, like a stereo's equalizer display, should sit still for a while. The clothes in our closets today will be the ones we're wearing when we're old.

Keep an eye on the construction pits that developers dug to make way for the foundations of new buildings. The town is pocked with them. The real-estate boom fostered grand schemes, which, though they are in many cases now stillborn, began with holes in the ground. The expiration, earlier this year, of a tax-abatement law, 421-a, encouraged residential builders to dig quickly, to achieve grandfather status and thus better financing. Hence a sudden spate of new pits, some that builders may have had no intention of filling soon anyway. In some cases, if a developer hasn't already paid for the steel, he will be inclined, or forced, to walk away. Buildings that are halfway built tend

NOW WHAT

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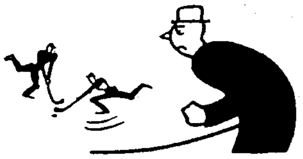
to get finished, although they may wind up being what are called "see-throughs."

What will become of the pits? Can we turn them into half-wild swimming holes, like the granite quarries of New England? Ring them with barbed wire and convert them into debtors' prisons or internment camps for the culprits who structured synthetic C.D.O.s? They'd make excellent ha-has, for livery horses or livestock. Corn mazes. Extreme-cockfighting arenas. Or perhaps they could serve, over time, as urban tar pits, entrapping and preserving in garbage and white brick dust the occasional unlucky passerby for the scientific edification of future generations, if there turn out to be any. Or they could become parking lots.

Vacant space tends to remain vacant, in anticipation of an upswing. Tax policy, inertia, and the eternal belief that things will get better (profitable) again usually trump civic dreams of pocket parks or stickball fields. Whoever ends up owning it all, after the foreclosures and the workouts are done, holds out for the big payday. The greatest pit of them all is at Ground Zero, where the squabbling among constituents and stakeholders, as well as the usual big-city incompetence, even before the financial meltdown, has kept the hole a hole for years. Now it's hard to imagine a way out of it.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

AT THE RINK FROM RUSSIA



Jaromir Jagr has gone to Siberia, for a wagonload of petrodollars. Jagr, a Czech, was the captain and leading scorer last season of the New York Rangers, Manhattan's most exalted hockey team. Now he wears No. 68 for the team Avangard Omsk, a gift from life for Laurie Carr, a Web developer who lives in Mine Hill, New Jersey, and runs BeyondtheBlueshirts, a Web site on which, from her living-room sofa, she translates daily hockey reports from the Russian press. Specifically, she follows Russian, European, and North American Ranger prospects, as well as former and current players. Carr, who is thirty-five, started the site in July, and her first big story was Jagr's being courted and then signed by the Russian league, to which sportswriters frequently attach the word "upstart," since this is its first season, and it hopes, with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's support, to supplant the N.H.L. (A more sombre story involving Omsk broke in the middle of October, when a nineteen-year-old named Alexei Cherepanov, the Rangers' first draft pick in 2007, collapsed while sitting next to Jagr on the bench, and died of heart failure.)

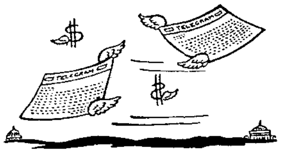
Carr and her husband, Jeremy, who is British, hold season tickets for the Rangers. One evening recently, before a game, Carr, who has brown hair and wide-set blue eyes, sat on a bench outside a Holiday Inn Express on West Twenty-ninth Street, near the Garden, while Ranger fans, some of them carrying jerseys over their arms like vestments, went past. She said that she had begun her site as a means of improving her Russian. She grew up in New Jersey, with a father whose ancestors were Ukrainian and who followed the Rangers. Somewhat eccentrically, Carr felt oppressed by the vestiges of the Cold War. "I was alternately fascinated and frightened to death that I was going to wake up one day and the whole world was going to end, because Russia and America would launch missiles at each other," she said. She began to read avidly about Russia and Russian culture. In high school, she bought some "try-and-learn-it-at-home tapes to teach myself Russian, but it wasn't until college that I really studied it," she said. She took four years of Russian at Drew University and spent a few weeks in Russia on a school-sponsored tour, but by the time she graduated she was reading the language better than she could speak it. Among her longest conversations in Russian was one conducted last year in a hallway of the Hartford Civic Center, where the Hartford Wolf Pack, the Rangers' principal farm team, plays. Carr owns a Russian jersey signed by Artem Anisimov, who plays for Hartford. Her husband was wearing the jersey when they heard someone behind them shouting, "Anisimov!"—the player's mother and father, and his girlfriend, who was visiting from Russia.

Carr's interest in hockey lapsed briefly during college, but in 2004 it returned. That was the year that the owners of the N.H.L. teams shut down the league until the players' union agreed to a salary cap. During the lockout, a number of N.H.L. skaters played hockey abroad, among them Jagr, then widely regarded as the world's best player. Carr found herself visiting Web sites such as Sport-Express.ru and Sovsport.ru and typing in "Jaromir Jagr," then using a clunky online translation service to read how he was doing; her Russian "had grown rusty." When the N.H.L. started up again, a few Ranger players remained in Russia, and the Rangers had drafted some Russian players, too. In 2006, she found herself spending enough time reading about players and prospects and relying on disjointed translations that she decided that she "needed to do something about it."

Carr began to translate reports for a handful of hockey sites and then established BeyondtheBlueshirts, which had twelve thousand visits last month. Cameron Hope, an assistant general manager with the Rangers, says that he consults the site to interpret remarks made by Russian officials. Meanwhile, Carr's Russian has improved; with the help of a dictionary, she can read whole articles now, whereas when she started she could only scan a piece for a name. As she stood to add herself to the procession of blue jerseys heading toward the Garden, she said, "I haven't read the Great Works in Russian yet. Mostly, I read Russian children's stories in college. That's about where we're at."

—*Alec Wilkinson*

DEPT. OF MOONLIGHTING
BALLAD OF THE BUBBLE



Robert Graves once remarked that just as there is no money in poetry, there is no poetry in money. But Katy Lederer sees it differently. Lederer has just published "The Heaven-Sent Leaf," a collection of poetry animated by the idea of the economic bubble. "It's so dry when you read it in the papers, but, really, it's mythic," she said recently, on a day that the stock market had dropped three hundred and seventy points. "It's Icarus, it's 'Faust,' it's Eros and *vanitas*. It's 'Star Wars'!" If this is not a formula for literary success, it's good market timing, at least; she might be the John Paulson of verse.

For the past six years, Lederer, who is thirty-six and holds an M.F.A. in poetry from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, has worked at D. E. Shaw, one of the world's largest hedge funds, with thirty-six billion dollars under its management. The other day, in her apartment in Prospect Heights, she recalled her decision to take the job: "Everyone I knew in the poetry world was pretty confused, like maybe I had gone crazy." She had already published a volume of poetry and a memoir, "Poker Face," which describes her coming-of-age in a family of gamblers (her siblings Howard Lederer and Annie Duke are two of the world's best poker players). Still, facing her thirtieth birthday, she was bouncing between illegal sublets and living on part-time jobs and peanut-butter sandwiches. "I wanted money," she said.

At first, Lederer's two lives—the creative and the corporate—remained separate; she was another one of New York's day jobbers, leaving her writing each morning to toil in "pristine white hallways," as a line from "The Heaven-Sent Leaf" puts it. Meanwhile, her fortunes rose along with the fund's; she became vice-president of recruiting, earning a salary that was "multiples of what many creative-writing professors I know make."

Then, in 2004, she spent a month at Yaddo. For reading, she took along study materials for the Series 7 stockbroker's exam, as well as books by Thorstein Veblen and John Kenneth Galbraith. "Veblen talks about poetry as being similar to Latin, useless and a waste of time," she said. "It's a form of conspicuous consumption." Still, Lederer said, she was struck by the metaphors he and Galbraith used. "The language is gorgeous," she said. "Like Edith Wharton and Dorothy Parker, Galbraith is witty and sarcastic." She started to crib phrases like "dead-level," "squirrel wheel," and "immiseration of the masses" for her verse.

The results were the beginnings of "The Heaven-Sent Leaf" (BOA Editions), whose title takes its name from a passage in "Faust" describing money. The book explores not just economic bubbles but metaphysical bubbles—the highs and lows of love, religious ecstasy, and aesthetic rapture. In "The Flower of Life" (the title is from Wharton), Lederer writes:

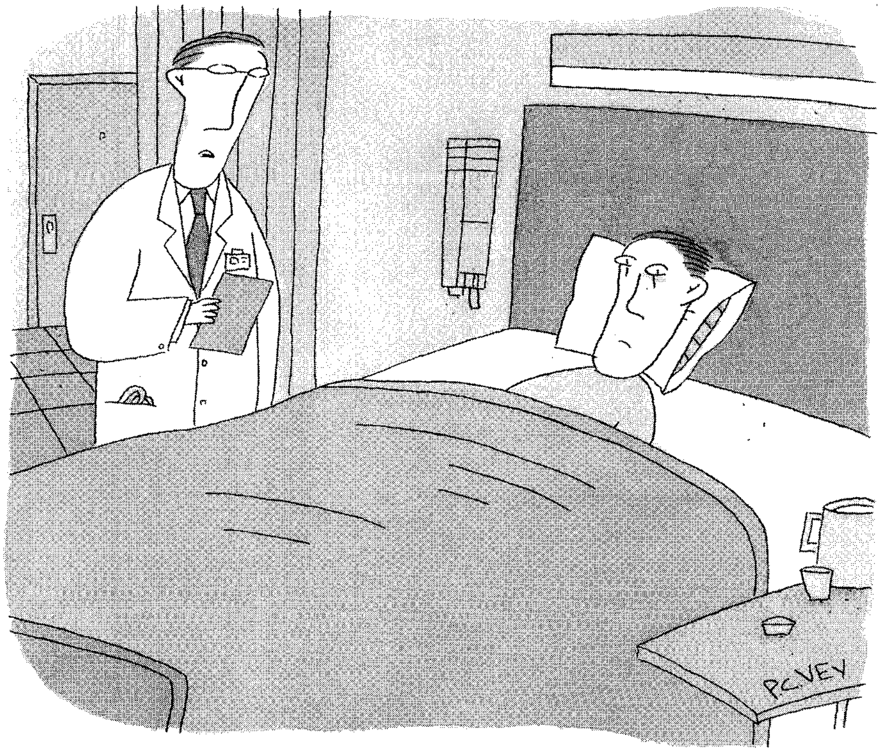
> Today, from the bridge, the East River
>   is sparkling.
> The money is swirling around the tall
>   buildings like tides or like tithes,
> And I wonder, does anyone swim in
>   this river, I wonder, does anyone pray?

The poems are tense and flinty (a review in *Publishers Weekly* praised their "viscous push-pull between money and Eros"). From her insider's vantage point, Lederer said, she could see that this most recent bubble was bound to explode. "It was in the air three years ago. Like, at work everyone knew," she recalled. "Even I could tell it was going to happen. I wondered, why would people trade if they knew the bubble would burst? That's what the whole book is about."

"Intimacy," probably the first love poem to cite the nineteen-eighties junk-bond king Michael Milken, describes Milken's "pulmonary conscience pumping darkly in his greedy heart." Lederer said she views Milken as a "Gollum-like" figure. "He was a creative genius, the way that he packaged debt," she said. "In finance, that makes you Mozart. Ultimately, however, that was also his downfall."

Just before Labor Day, Lederer left the hedge fund, though she continues to do freelance recruiting for financial firms. She is now on a twenty-eight-city book tour. (She's paying for it herself.) Still, she said, she hasn't been writing much. "I've been watching my 401k go up and down."

—*Rebecca Rothbaum*



"We're moving you to a room with a better pillow."

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
ENTER, PURSUED BY A BEAR

When news broke that Timothy Geithner was Barack Obama's pick for Secretary of the Treasury, the stock market jumped more than six per cent in the space of an hour. Obviously, this was a good thing, but there was also something weird about the spectacle of the Street's once fearless free marketeers exulting over a government appointment, as if they were nomenklatura members cheering a new Politburo chief. It showed just how central a few government officials have become to the well-being not just of the markets but of the economy as a whole. For better or worse, we now live in a world in which the Treasury Secretary controls hundreds of billions of dollars in spending and shapes the fate of some of the nation's biggest companies. That's quite a job to ask someone to do.

If anyone is up to the task, Geithner seems to be. A decade ago, as a Treasury under-secretary, he helped orchestrate the successful response to the Asian financial meltdown. As head of the New York Federal Reserve, he was prescient about systemic risks to the financial system. And, during the current crisis, he's the third member of the fire brigade led by the outgoing Treasury Secretary, Henry Paulson, and the chairman of the Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke. Geithner will be well partnered: Christina Romer, who will be running the Council of Economic Advisers, is an expert on the Great Depression, and Larry Summers, who is both a superlative academic economist and a former Treasury Secretary, will be running the National Economic Council. It's not surprising that Obama's economic team is already drawing comparisons to the New York Yankees. (Let's hope they're the 1927 Yankees, rather than the more recent edition.)

Still, no Treasury Secretary has ever entered office with as much responsibility as Geithner will have. That's partly because the crisis is so huge, but it's also the result of an evolution in the role that we expect government to play in the economy. For much of American history, Treasury Secretaries were nondescript, and their powers circumscribed. When the Panic of 1907 nearly froze financial markets, it was to J. P. Morgan, not Treasury Secretary George Cortelyou, that investors turned for a solution. Our contemporary preference for government rescues has its roots in the Great Depression, when Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon became notorious for his contention that, even as the economy was collapsing, the market should simply be allowed to do its work. "Liquidate labor, liquidate stocks, liquidate the farmers, liquidate real estate," he coldly advised. The perceived failure of this approach discredited non-intervention, and ended up enhancing the influence of Mellon's successors.

In recent years, as the frequency and the severity of financial crises have increased, so, too, has the prominence of the Treasury Secretary's role. During the Clinton Administration, Robert Rubin engineered a backdoor bailout of the Mexican economy, before helping to manage the global financial crisis of the late nineties. Paulson seems to unveil a new government program nearly every day, and his actions over the past year have meant life or death for financial institutions.

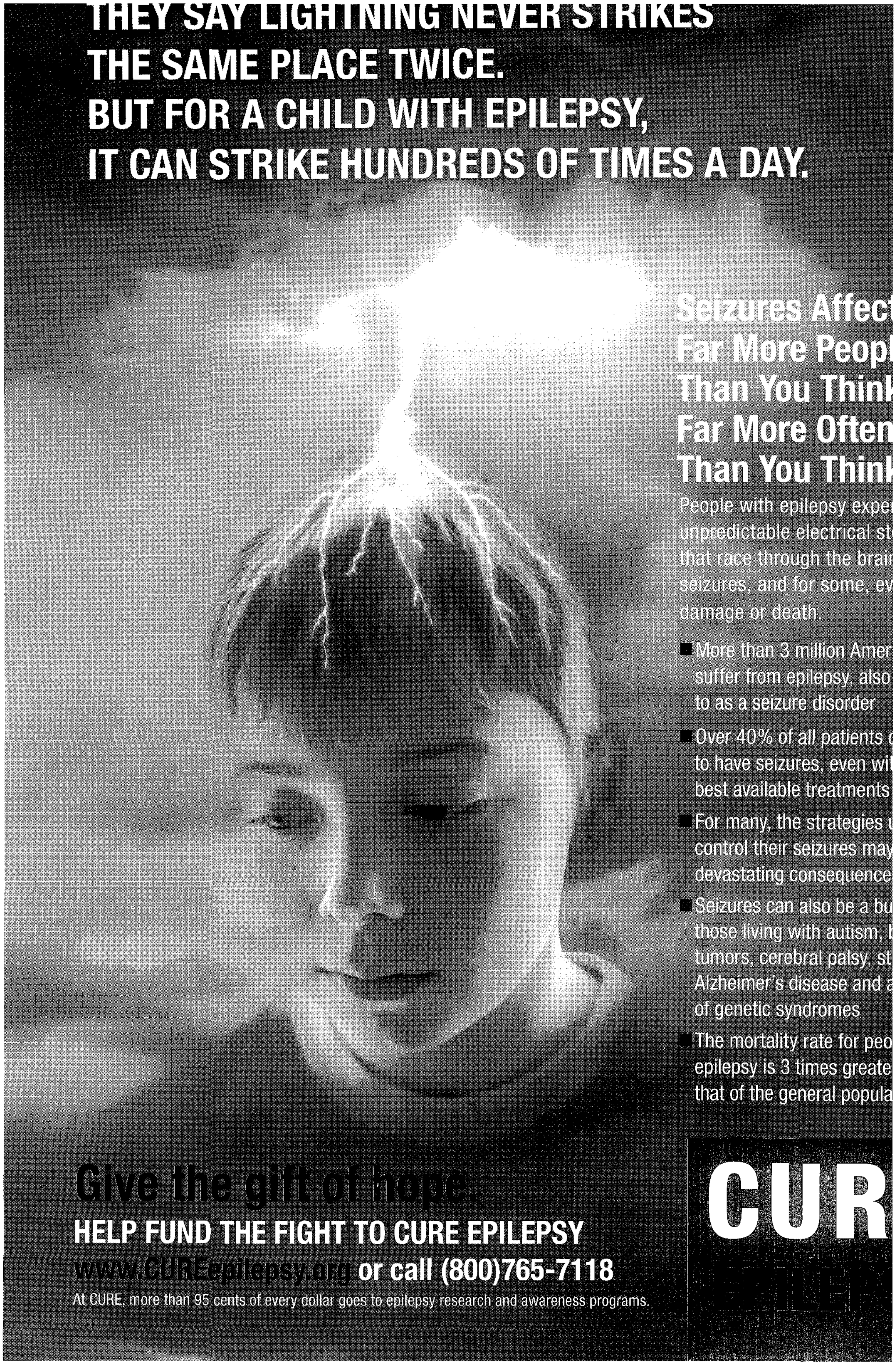
CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

The problem is that for this kind of power to be effective in a crisis, the markets need to be confident that the government has a coherent strategy in place. And while Paulson has certainly acted aggressively in the past two months, at times it has seemed as if the Treasury were making things up as it went along. Initially, Paulson rejected the idea of using some of the bailout money to recapitalize banks, planning instead to buy toxic assets and get them off bank balance sheets. Then he announced that he would recapitalize banks and, a month later, that there would be no toxic-asset purchases after all. And last week he unveiled a plan to backstop consumer debt. On their own, each of these moves may have made sense. But the zigzags left the markets discombobulated and uncertain.

There's no doubt that, in dealing with the crisis, Paulson has done a yeoman's job. But in some respects he's just been in the wrong place at the wrong time. When he became Treasury Secretary, in 2006, he had more of a reputation as a deal-maker than as a strategic thinker. He was leery of regulation—at his nomination hearing, he warned of the perils of "creeping regulatory expansion"—and seemed skeptical of government interference with markets. This background may have made Paulson the right man to deal with what then seemed like the Bush Administration's biggest priorities, things like tax policy and China. But it perhaps wasn't the best preparation for orchestrating the largest government intervention in American history.

By contrast, Wall Street seems to see in Geithner someone who, with his experience fighting financial crises and regulating markets, has been effectively training for his new job for more than a decade. Furthermore, Geithner combines a sense of continuity with the prospect of decisive change. He's an advocate of free markets, but he has also called for tighter regulation. As a Rubin disciple, he believes in fiscal responsibility, but he also supports a major stimulus package. And while he was part of the team that watched Lehman Brothers fail, he seems more comfortable with government action than Paulson, and therefore more likely to act in a consistent fashion. In times of crisis, after all, it isn't just what the government does that matters—it's also the way the government does it. Geithner projects a conviction that acting to arrest financial meltdown is not just necessary but right. In these times, that's something the market is surprisingly happy to hold on to.

—*James Surowiecki*



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LETTER FROM PASHMUL

POLICING AFGHANISTAN

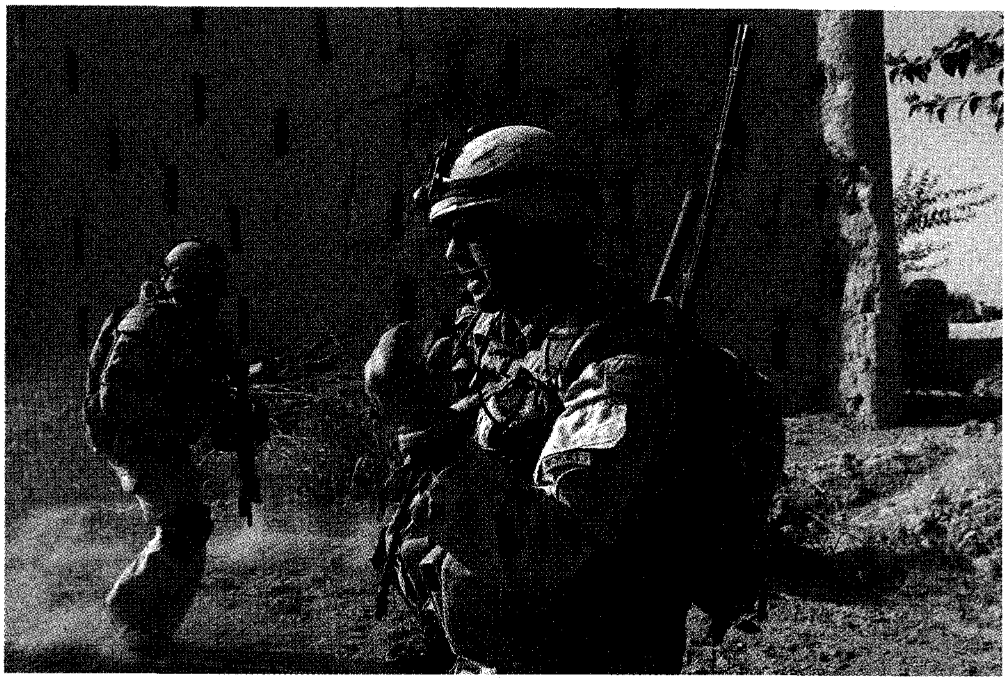
An ethnic-minority force enters a Taliban stronghold.

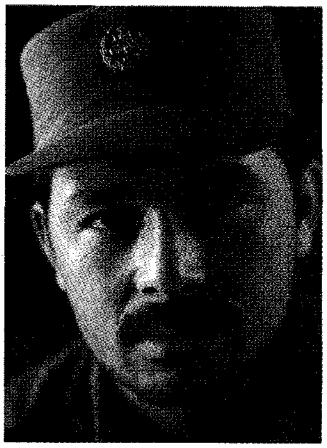
BY GRAEME WOOD

In late 2007, in Pashmul, a tiny cluster of villages in southern Afghanistan, Muhammad Khan began his tenure as the police commander by torching all the hemp in a farmer's field. Farmers in the area had grown plants up to seven feet tall, and, being teetotallers, like many Afghans, they smoked hashish constantly. Afghan soldiers and policemen in the area also smoked, to the exasperation of the NATO troops who were training them. But Khan wasn't from Pashmul and he didn't smoke. He ordered his men to set the harvest ablaze, moved upwind, then turned his back and left, with an expression of indifference.

Khan and his police officers are members of Afghanistan's Hazara minority, identifiable among Afghans because of their Asiatic features; the population they patrol is Pashtun. Hazaras are mostly Shia, with a history of ties to Iran, whereas most Pashtuns are Sunni and have turned to Pakistan for support. Over the past century, the two peoples have fought periodically, and the Hazaras, who are thought to make up between nine and nineteen per cent of Afghanistan's population—the Pashtuns make up nearly half—have usually lost. On the border between the Hazara heartland, in the country's mountainous and impoverished center, and the Pashtun plains in the south and east, conflicts over grazing land are common. But, working alongside NATO soldiers, Hazara police units are now operating far to the south of these traditional battlegrounds and deep into Pashtun territory.

The Pashmul base is just outside the city of Kandahar, in one of Afghanistan's most dangerous regions. Last year, the Taliban all but wiped out the Afghan National Police, or A.N.P., squads there. Deploying Hazaras in this region is a risky move, and comes at a time when Taliban bombings and assassinations are making clear the failure of the U.S.-led NATO coalition and the Afghan government to secure the country. Recently, a draft of a National Intelligence Estimate said that increasingly effective insurgent attacks and widespread corruption in President Hamid Karzai's government have eroded the government's authority, and concluded that the country is in a "downward spiral." And a leaked diplomatic cable quoted the British Ambassador as saying that "the presence of the coalition, in particular its military presence, is part of the problem, not part of its solution." If the coalition were to leave, the country would be left with the ragtag Afghan National Army, or A.N.A., which deploys wherever it is needed to fight the Taliban in counterinsurgency battles, and the A.N.P., which is responsible for street-level law enforcement and now bears the brunt of the Taliban insurgency. (Last year, nearly four times as many Afghan police were killed as soldiers.) Among Afghans, the A.N.P. has become known for incompetence and corruption. Units like Khan's, made up of a despised minority with an unsparing attitude toward those they police, embody many of the paradoxes involved in trying to bring order to Afghanistan's ethnically fissured society.





Left: Mike Vollick orders troops to advance against insurgent positions in Pashmul. Above: Afghan National Police commander Muhammad Khan. Photographs by Louie Palu.

In July, I visited Pashmul's police base, a small installation about twice as large as a tennis court and surrounded by ditches and razor wire. Nearby are crumbling Pashtun villages of mud-brick homes, sprinkled with trash and unexploded ordnance. Pashmul is ideal terrain for an insurgency. The main sources of

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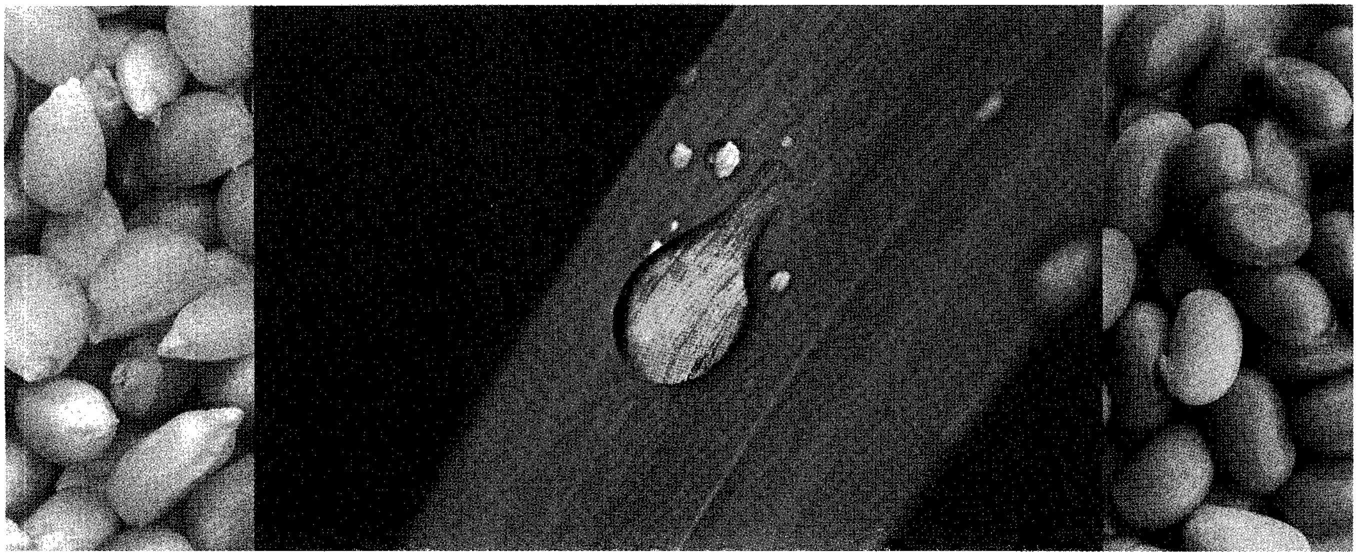

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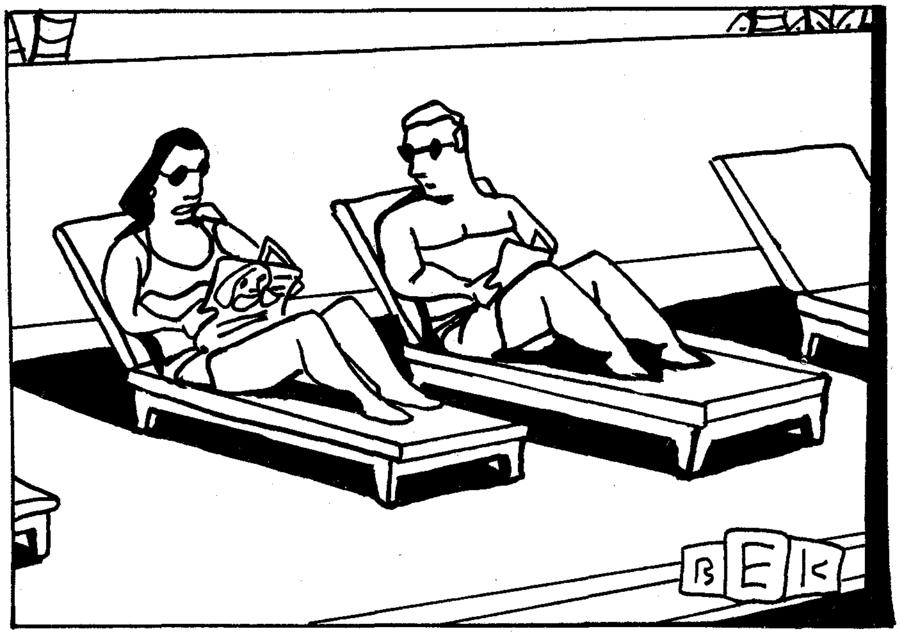
livelihood, other than hemp and poppies, are grapes and pomegranates, and, during the summer fighting season, foliage in fields and orchards provides cover for insurgents. Because farmers are too poor to use wooden frames in their vineyards, their grapevines are supported by deep furrows cut in the earth; thus in an apparently empty field hundreds of Taliban may be hidden. Grape huts, scattered around the fields, have mud walls thick enough to stop bullets, and narrow ventilation slits that can accommodate rifle barrels. Fighting has caused many Pashmul residents to flee to a temporary camp in the desert, from which they trek several miles each morning to cultivate the fields.

Khan's police unit patrols a war zone, and the men often do the work of soldiers rather than of normal beat police officers. Although the Army lends support when the police encounter armed resistance, the soldiers then retreat to a base outside Pashmul. On most days, the police patrol the alleys alone, except for a few Canadian soldiers whom NATO has assigned to train and mentor them. Taliban snipers routinely fire at the base's wooden guard towers, and the Hazara policemen fire back. They watch the rickety pickups that pass on a paved road along the base's eastern edge, on the lookout for suicide bombers. Khan's men know the faces in each village, but they remain an alien presence. One man, who sold goats to the Hazara policemen, would say hello to the patrol when it walked past his home; his corpse later turned up in the next village.

Now in his late twenties, Muhammad Khan has an intense manner and an unsettling stare. When I met him, he gave me an appraising look, his glare landing on the book in my hand, Paul Theroux's "My Secret History." Khan asked me, in Persian, what I was reading, and, struggling to recall the word for "novel," I said it was "a book." He gave me the same suspicious look I later saw when he confronted frightened farmers about insurgents in their fields. "That much I can see," he said. "Is it a novel?"

Khan's directness enables him to work efficiently with his Canadian supervisors—particularly Mike Vollick, a warrant officer stationed at Khan's police base. An infantryman, Vollick is thirty-seven and of medium height, with sturdy arms that, when I met him, five months after his arrival in Pashmul, were scabby from dozens of sand-fly bites. The Canadians and the Hazaras communicate reasonably well, although they mostly use a translator and don't have more than a few dozen words in common, most of which describe military equipment. Vollick considers Khan the most effective Afghan police commander he has seen, and an ideal candidate for district police chief, although, given Khan's inability to speak Pashto, the local language, and the strength of Pashtun prejudice, this would be an unlikely appointment.



"We got a lovely note from Sarah saying that her thoughts are with us during this easy time."

Khan enforces high standards—the men's blue-gray uniforms are tidy, and military routine is strictly followed—which are all the more impressive given the lack of discipline and infighting in most Afghan police units. The men enjoy the slightly giddy camaraderie of a team under permanent siege, and they are bold fighters, though their zeal often exceeds the behavior that might be expected of a group given the task of winning the trust of an uneasy citizenry. Once, when Vollick called off a planned patrol into Taliban territory for tactical reasons, he had to assuage the Hazaras' sense of honor by explaining why he had not led the group into battle.

The day before I arrived, Vollick and Khan, after months of long-range firefights across fields and vineyards, had planned an ambush of Taliban who, villagers said, sometimes gathered at a cemetery some five hundred yards from the base. The Hazaras took up a position near the cemetery, and soon two men carrying heavy blankets rounded a corner and passed a mud wall. Vollick stayed back to watch how the policemen behaved. They passed the first test by not immediately killing both men. But as soon as Khan's men called for the Talibs to halt, they dropped the blankets and raised Kalashnikov assault rifles that were hidden underneath. The Hazaras outdrew them, and one policeman—who looked several years younger than his stated age of eighteen—emptied an entire magazine at one of the men, who fell dead with more than twenty bullets in his chest. The other man scrambled away, wounded.

The Hazara men had never been this close to their enemy before, and they were eager to pursue the wounded man. But Vollick shouted at them to stay where they were, fearing that they would be led into a trap. "They were losing their minds, they were so excited," Vollick told me later.

The dead man wore an orange skullcap, a loose shalwar kameez, sandals that the Hazaras identified as Pakistani, and Chinese military webbing that held his ammunition and weapons. Vollick found a small book of names and phone numbers, as well as a rusted rifle whose stock

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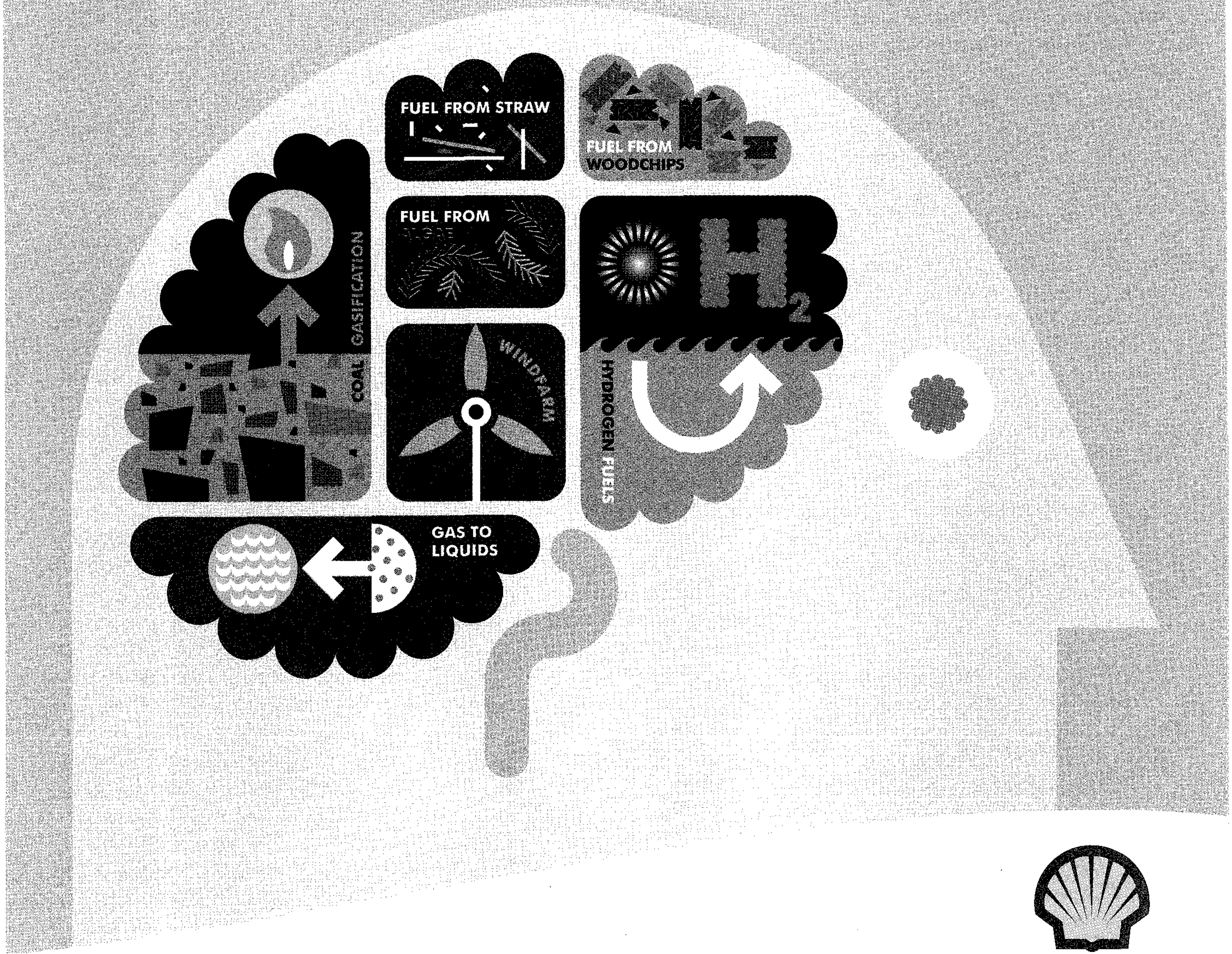
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COAL GASIFICATION
FUEL FROM ALGAE
H2
WINDFARM
HYDROGEN FUELS
GAS TO LIQUIDS

had been shortened for easy concealment. Moments later, the group heard shots nearby. Another patrol had encountered a third insurgent, and two policemen killed him at point-blank range.

Soon, insurgents began shooting wildly from a concealed position. Vollick ordered a retreat, and the group ran through the alleys toward the base. The policemen moved with their Kalashnikovs raised, and Vollick shouted at them to lower their weapons, to avoid shooting innocent farmers. The group returned with no casualties other than its composure and professionalism; the Hazaras had behaved more like a paramilitary group than like a professional police team. They hung the rusty rifle on a wall as a trophy. In the next days, every Hazara I met pointed to it with pride. That evening, they listened eagerly to the Taliban's radio channels, which featured confused messages about someone named Bashir. Villagers later reported that the wounded man had died.

Two days later, Vollick, sitting in the base's kitchen, with his back to a wall of M.R.E.s and granola bars, described the operation as a success. Police had subsequently picked up a suspected insurgent leader in the area, and Vollick ascribed the capture to Taliban panic resulting from the ambush. "We hit them when we chose, and they had no idea who did it or how," he said. When he said "we," he gestured to the Hazaras' sleeping quarters, twenty feet away. "It was a psychological victory." The Hazaras I spoke with described the sprint back to the base, easily the most dangerous moment of the ambush, with nonchalance. Muhammad Hussein—the boy who killed the first Talib—chain-smoked as he described it. "It wasn't that serious," he said. "They launched one rocket, but it was far from us." But Vollick, a professional warrior, remembered the sprint differently. "We were running for our fucking lives," he said.

The Hazaras trace their bloodline to soldiers of Genghis Khan who settled in Afghanistan in the thirteenth century. Some scholars doubt this pedigree, but Hazara mothers remind their children of their Mongol heritage by addressing them as "*bachah-ye Moghol*"—"child of Mongols"—to teach them good manners. In the late nineteenth century, the Hazaras were among several groups who revolted against Abdur Rahman Khan, Afghanistan's Pashtun king. They lost badly, and Khan built towers of Hazara skulls as a lesson to the survivors. Most of the surviving Hazaras fell into poverty, doing the work of draft animals and slaves. Pashtun nomads seized Hazara-held pastures and farmland at the southern foot of the mountains in central Afghanistan.

The British noted the Hazaras' role as servants and manual laborers in Kabul, and saw an opportunity. The Orientalist Edward Balfour, though he described the Hazaras as "unblushing beggars and thieves," went on to write, "Some of the clans have a military repute; they would make good soldiers, and might have risen to distinction, but they are disunited." Lord Kitchener directed the Indian Army to create a unit of Hazaras, along the lines of the Nepalese Gurkhas, and in 1904 the 106th Hazara Pioneers was formed. Known for fine marksmanship, the regiment fought in France in the First World War and in Baghdad in the early nineteen-twenties.

During the rest of the twentieth century, Pashtuns further encroached on Hazara land, and extremist Sunni clerics declared the murder of Hazaras a righteous act. In the nineteen-eighties, the Soviet occupation largely spared the Hazara homeland, but they mounted an insurgency nonetheless, singing revolutionary songs whose villains were Pashtuns rather than Soviets. By the nineteen-nineties, when the Sunni Taliban formed around Mullah Omar, the Hazaras had found an Iranian-backed Shiite, Abdul Ali Mazari, to oppose him. Mazari led Hazara attacks on the Taliban, but, in 1995, he was captured, tortured, and thrown from a helicopter near Ghazni, southwest of Kabul. After Mazari, no Hazara leader reached national prominence until the formation of the Karzai government, in 2002. During the Taliban ascendancy, Muhammad Khan and all his men lived in Iran, as refugees. Khan himself has spent twenty years there—most of his life—and he speaks with a slight Iranian accent. Having been treated poorly as refugees, these Hazaras have no lingering fondness for Iran, but they have benefitted from the country's superior educational standards. This, together with their determination to reëstablish themselves in what some Hazaras regard as their ancestral homeland, makes them effective janissaries for NATO.

The formation of police units like Khan's gives the Hazaras greater authority outside their own territory than they've had in a century. It is also a classic counter-insurgency gambit. Tom Donnelly, a defense analyst at the American Enterprise Institute, who has undertaken a book-length study of NATO in Afghanistan, compares it to the American use of Shiite militias to fight Sunni insurgency in Iraq. "It's a common tactic in irregular warfare situations to pit the rivalries of an ethnically diverse populace against each other," he told me. The difficulty is finding a way to avoid unleashing a dispossessed minority on a rampage of revenge against the group it is asked to control.

Alessandro Monsutti, an anthropologist who has studied the Hazaras, fears that the short-term gain of the Hazara units' efficacy may be outweighed by long-term harm. "They're very efficient for narrow, military targets," he told me. "But what about rebuilding the country?" Donnelly, too, acknowledges that the use of ethnic militias could lead to explosive retribution when NATO leaves Afghanistan. (European use of privileged local minorities in colonial Africa contributed to the continent's most destructive post-colonial wars, including the Rwandan genocide.) The Hazaras have not, historically, fared well in combat with the Pashtuns, although the policemen at Pashmul seem eager to try their luck. When Vollick asked them where he could get more police like them, they replied that they could raise a militia of a thousand men in their homeland, in Daykundi Province.

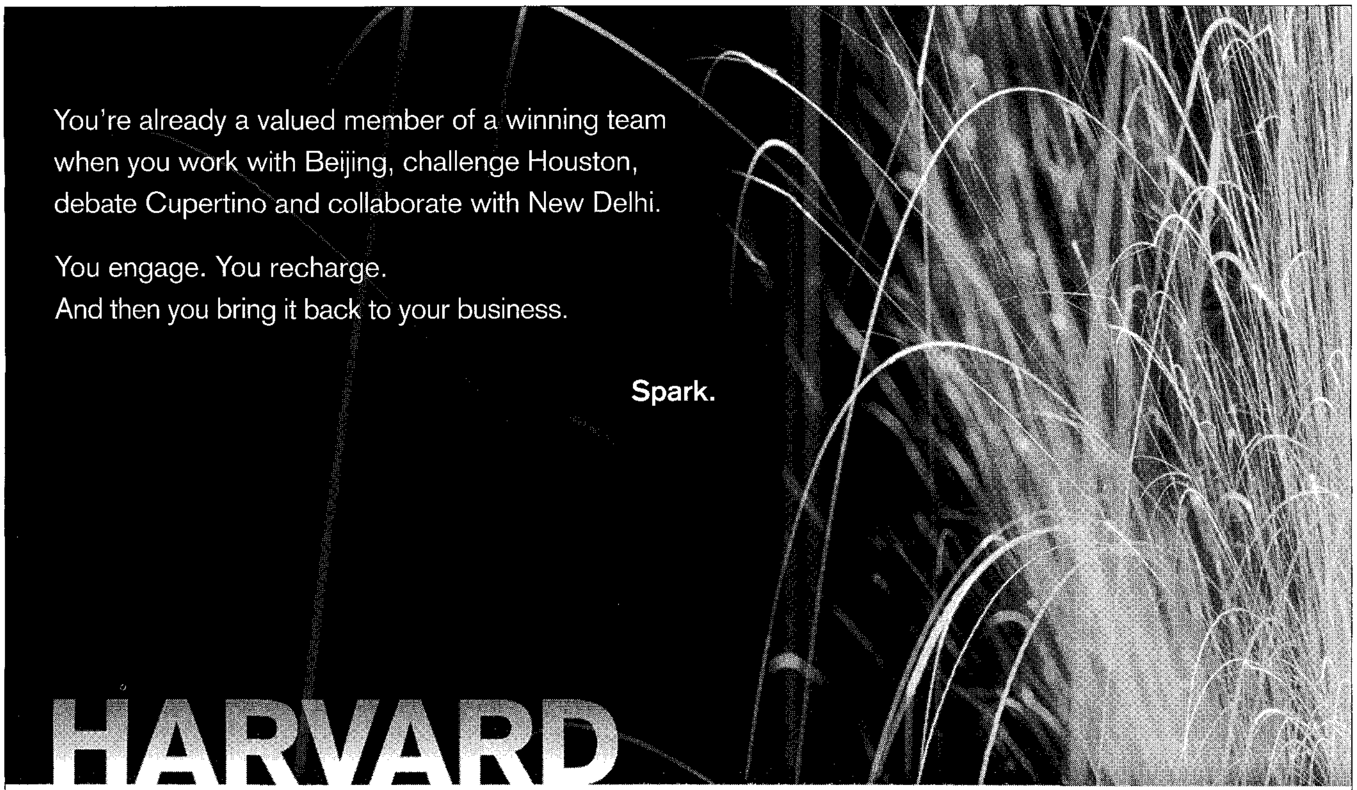
At the command level, the decision to exploit one of Afghanistan's least noted and most bitter ethnic rivalries seems to have been improvised rather than planned. I asked Brigadier-General Denis Thompson, the top Canadian commander, about Khan's unit, and he emphasized the similarity between Hazaras and Pashtuns, rather than the differences. "The advantage of any Afghan, regardless of their ethnicity, is that they get a better measure of what's going on on the ground than we could ever get," he said. "They know when something is amiss in this district." No NATO officer I met seemed to appreciate the full significance of the Hazara-Pashtun rivalry.

At least in the short term, the deployment of Hazara police in Pashtun areas seems to have worked well, especially in the context of the ineffectiveness of Pashtun units and the area's slide toward Taliban control. Less than a mile from the Hazaras' base, the Taliban have trenches and permanent defensive positions. Vollick told me that beyond the trenches there were recreation areas and field hospitals for insurgents, a safe area invaluable for launching attacks on the city of Kandahar.

The Afghan security forces can blame at least part of their failure on geography. The Pashmul region is near Pakistan and is a common first stop for foreign fighters. Historically, too, it has been a center of insurgency. According to one NATO officer, the Soviet occupation never really controlled Pashmul's district, despite assigning an entire division to it. And it was at Singesar, a village west of Pashmul, that, in 1994, Mullah Omar organized the militia that became the Taliban. The village remains a Taliban center, and last May NATO opted to abandon it, after deciding that the effort of maintaining the small base there could not be justified in terms of resources. No NATO or Afghan government soldier has stepped openly into Singesar since.

Still, policing efforts have been greatly hindered by the fact that indigenous police forces who worked with Vollick before Khan's unit came to the region shirked their duties and sometimes even collaborated with the Taliban by letting them pass armed through checkpoints. "The Pashtuns just want to eat, sleep, and collect a paycheck," one Canadian soldier at Pashmul told me. "They come here and they know the people here. And they'd say to each other, 'If you find a weapon, don't tell the Canadians.' " At one point, the Pashmul base experimented with a mixture of Pashtun and Tajik police, but the unit, after sustaining severe losses at the hands of the Taliban, refused to leave the base. When finally shamed into patrolling, they sang songs as they marched, and wrapped plastic flowers around their rifle barrels.

Soon after I left the Hazara police camp, I had the opportunity to see how an ethnically mixed security force operates, on a mission with the A.N.A. About a mile from Vollick's base, at the border of a large vineyard and a garden of hemp plants, I met Captain Simon Cox, a ten-year veteran of the Canadian Forces, who had spent a few months mentoring A.N.A. units. Two days earlier, NATO artillery strikes had destroyed a Taliban position. Footage from a Predator drone suggested that Taliban soldiers had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suffered serious injuries and that, more interestingly, villagers had surrounded and stoned wounded Talibs as they tried to crawl away. Cox's mission was to lead soldiers to the village to find out what had happened, and to see whether they could harness any anti-Taliban feeling. Some areas haven't seen a patrol in years, so even farmers who might sympathize with the government lack any guarantee that the government will protect them if they oppose the Taliban. "How are these people supposed to know about their government and support it when there's no police there?" Cox asked.

The men on duty were not inattentive, but they seemed fundamentally unserious. They lacked initiative, and sat back and murmured to one another while the Canadians interviewed a local farmer. The Canadians barely spoke with their A.N.A. contingent at all, and the Afghan soldiers seemed to regard it as their principal duty to stand in place while the Canadians conducted their search.

The team cornered a farmer, who confirmed that some villagers had persuaded the Taliban to set up their heavy machine gun in another area, in case the Canadians sent in artillery to destroy the position. The team seized on the disclosure as a sign that the villagers could rise up against the Taliban. The farmer shook his head. "No," he said. "We can argue with you. Not with them. If we say just one thing against the insurgents, they will come and kill us."

"Have the insurgents come back to say that to you?" the Canadian asked.

The farmer leaned in and looked around. "They always come here."

Soon afterward, Cox received word that some insurgents were just a few hundred yards away. An unmanned aerial vehicle had spotted men clustering south of us, across a vineyard and near a suspected weapons cache. Cox summoned an A.N.A. quick-reaction force, to support an assault against the position. Half an hour later, no one had arrived, and Cox was furious. He yelled at his counterpart in the Afghan forces, stabbing his finger at the soldier, who was suppressing a laugh: "I'm asking you if they're ready to come here and help us fight. If you want to take this job half-assed, then fucking get out of the Army."

When the Afghan quick-response force arrived, its soldiers stood looking dazed. We started to move toward the insurgents' position by fanning in two directions—one of the most basic tactical maneuvers an infantry unit can attempt. The Afghans now looked slightly frightened—less of the Taliban ambush than of their officer, an Afghan captain trained by Green Berets. As he issued commands through a radio, the soldiers moved down the road and into the vineyard, correctly enough but with uneasy attention to detail, like a troupe of dancers staring at their feet. When we had closed half the distance, I crouched in a furrow, amid grapevines, until a soldier ahead of me—a stubbly, spindly man with a backpack full of rocket-propelled grenade warheads—yelped "Gun!" and pointed at the ambush point.

Seeing a weapon triggered the rules of engagement, and we ran toward the position. I kept my head low, looking at the ground a few steps ahead of me to avoid I.E.D.s. We leaped over an irrigation ditch, and, when I looked up to make sure I was still running in the right direction, I saw the soldier again. He had his grenade-launcher in one hand and, in the other, a colossal bunch of grapes, which he had started to eat. By the time we arrived at the place where the surveillance had spotted the insurgents, the Taliban had long since vanished back into the surrounding villages. As we stood in the empty Taliban position, I noticed that most of the Afghan soldiers carried grapes that they had picked up during the maneuver, and that they looked pleased.

Khan and Vollick's relationship is rare and exemplary among NATO soldiers and their Afghan counterparts. Other commanders in Vollick's position have had to pressure their Afghan counterparts to lead their men into unfriendly areas. Vollick is able to rely on Khan's initiative. Khan keeps the watchtowers manned, and insures that policemen are properly armed for patrolling. During planning, Vollick and Khan discuss tactics and the day's operations, and when they leave the base they walk together, conferring about which houses they need to inspect more closely, and which villagers are lying.

While in Pashmul, I followed a routine patrol. It was a couple of days after the ambush, and the men marched in an evenly spaced, disciplined line, with Khan and Vollick near the front and Khan's second-in-command in the rear. The Canadians wore brown camouflage and a standard array of body armor and ammunition. Khan wore a ballistic helmet, but several other Hazaras wore nothing but their uniforms and a few ammunition magazines.

Within minutes of leaving the base, we were twisting through Pashmul's narrow mud-walled alleys. Khan sometimes called out the name of his second-in-command over the radio to make sure that both ends of the patrol remained in touch. The men fell silent, and for ten minutes at a time communicated only in gestures, punctuated by the single word *harakat*, "movement," passed down the line to signal that the group should continue forward. They were watchful because of the possibility of an ambush—Taliban spotters monitor the patrols from the moment they leave the base—but also, it seemed, because alertness appealed to them. They sometimes sprang off the path recklessly to inspect a piece of suspicious trash, and they burst through doors, hoping to surprise anyone hiding inside. On that morning, though, the village was empty and silent. Khan and Vollick went to a suspected Taliban flophouse; the only sign of human habitation was a wooden table in the courtyard, with tomatoes on top, drying in the sun.

When the patrol encountered residents, Khan and Vollick asked them about Taliban in the area, and received jittery and unhelpful answers. Neither spoke Pashto, but through a translator they managed to perform a kind of good-cop, bad-cop act. Vollick approached two old men sitting outside a house, and asked about Taliban. The response was cordial but evasive. Vollick repeated a line, familiar by now to the villagers, about NATO's desire to make sure the government could meet their needs for schools and wells. While the men spoke, Khan rolled his eyes in operatic boredom and instructed his men to search the building and to frisk every passerby. The villagers obviously regarded Khan and Vollick as equally foreign. They denied any knowledge of Taliban activity, but, as Khan's aggressiveness and suspicion grew, they gave Vollick more and more desperate excuses for not coöperating—they were afraid, they said, and hadn't seen any insurgents anyway. Two other men and a teen-ager looked at us over the walls, perhaps close enough to report back to insurgents on what was said.

The next evening, I watched the sunset from one of the guard towers with Khan, Vollick, and Abbas, a senior Hazara policeman in his late twenties. When cars rolled by on the paved road next to the tower, Abbas stared the occupants down, his hand on his machine gun.

Khan and Vollick leaned on a parapet and chatted, as one commander to another. Through a translator, Khan argued with Vollick, and even flatly disagreed with him. When Vollick claimed that an area had a weapons cache, Khan spoke with authority, citing a lack of armed Taliban presence. "There's no weapons cache. If there were, they'd fight for it every day," he said. From the way he spoke, it was clear that the Hazaras saw their work as less a matter of policing fellow-citizens than of patrolling enemy territory.

Abbas stayed silent nearby. When Khan and Vollick left for dinner, he told me that he had another four or five months left before his next ten-day leave. He seldom talks to his wife and daughter, because his hundred-dollar monthly salary won't pay for a calling card. "Afghanistan's broken," he said. The weak economy, he told me, had driven him to join the A.N.P. As for relations between Pashtuns and Hazaras, he said, "We like Pashtuns, but the Pashtuns don't like us. We'd like Persian people and Pashtuns to get along, but they don't want it."

Below us, the off-duty policemen were singing songs to the accompaniment of a guitar made from an old camping-fuel can. From the tower, Abbas scanned the road and peered into a thermal imager that showed a night-vision image of the cemetery, from which someone had shot at the base earlier in the day.

In the fading light, he examined a car full of nervous Pashtuns as it drove past. "Taliban?" I asked him. "I don't know," he said. Later, two men and a boy walked by harmlessly, and he tapped me on the shoulder. "Those are Taliban. See them?" They wore black-and-white turbans, and may well have been Taliban. Or they could have been just farmers. "Is the boy a Talib?" I asked. "Future Talib," he said, and raised the binoculars to his eyes. ♦

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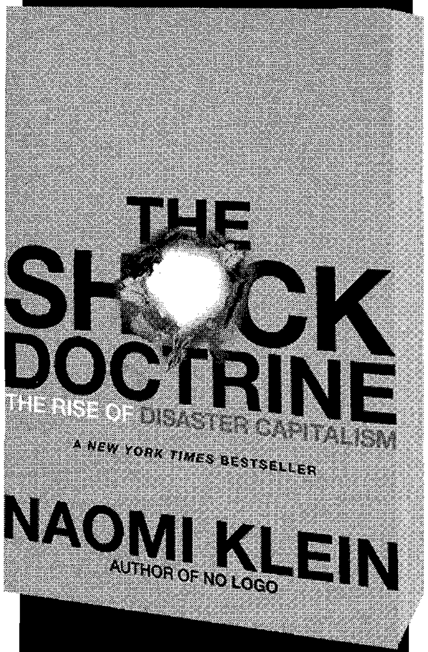

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I HAVE TO GO NOW

BY JENNY ALLEN

I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to close the cupboard that hard! I hope I didn't wake you!

I'm just looking for the coffee filters. It was so sweet of you last night to say, "If you're up before us, just help yourself to whatever. The coffee is pretty self-explanatory."

I'm sorry, I apologize, please forgive me—and thank you again for inviting me!—but doesn't "self-explanatory" mean self-explanatory, like it shouldn't need an explanation? Like I should be able to just come in here and find the things I need to make coffee all in one place, and within a few minutes gurgling, coffeemaking sounds and that exciting coffee smell will start coming out of the coffeemaker?

It took me a long time to even find the coffeemaker. It didn't look like a coffeemaker. It looked like a rocket ship. I kept passing it by on my tours of the counters, thinking it was—I don't know, I didn't think about it too much, but something complicated: a crème-fraîche-culture incubator, maybe; a sorbet churner, or a homemade-bialy steamer-cooker thing.

Please forgive me, a thousand forgive-mes, if I seem to be rude, but the rocket-ship machine didn't say "coffeemaker" to me, it didn't cry out, "Here I am, groggy friend, brave traveller, you who have come to this country place far from your city home, anxious about the burdens of being a house guest, not the least of which is having to stumble around a kitchen that is not your kitchen."

I only know this machine is the coffeemaker because there's this little basket that swings out—you have to press a hidden button to get it to pop out, like a bookcase that reveals a secret tunnel, like it was designed by Nancy Drew, or (it's German, I see by the annoying umlauts over the vowels in the brand name on the side) retired Stasi officers. The basket is shaped like a wide cone, and it looks like a filter should fit in there. Let us hope.

So where are the filters? I have been opening and closing cupboards for many minutes, many uncomfortable minutes, minutes in which I have felt, unaccountably, somehow stealthy, like a prowler, and, at the same time, guilty, like I've come here under the guise of being a guest but I am really a police detective sneaking around. And you think I am your friend! I'm so worried—terrified, really—that you two might come downstairs and think I'm looking for something secret, trying to find something here in the kitchen that you stashed away because you're ashamed of it. I can't even imagine what that would be (a cigarette from 1983? An old bong?), but that's how I feel.

I haven't found anything naughty—I don't want to, believe me!—but I do feel that I've intruded on your personal lives in a way that makes me feel ashamed: I'm sorry I discovered the Metamucil section, and the can of Ensure.

Forgive me, but I thought the filters might be in the same vicinity as the coffeemaker. Some people find that helpful. On the counter next to the coffeemaker, for example, or in the cupboard right above it. It's just a suggestion.

I have an idea. I am going to look for the coffee instead. Maybe, while I am looking for the coffee, the filters will show up. Near the coffee. That seems unlikely. Just kidding (mostly)!

In our house, we keep the coffee in the freezer. That keeps it fresh. In your house, I see, you do not. In your house, in your freezer, you keep—oh, crap! Landslide!—several huge old bags of ice you got for a long-ago party, which are now frozen into big blocks, and half-used boxes of Birds Eye stringbeans and an ancient, smashed Eskimo Pie. I've managed to catch everything in my arms, avoiding a noisy clatter on the floor, and

I'll just stick it all back now, in a way that will prevent another avalanche. It's a good idea, I've found, to arrange heavy things, like ten-pound blocks of ice, underneath lighter objects, like crushed Eskimo Pies.

Oh, look: here's a closet, a closet with shelves full of paper towels and laundry detergent. And here in the closet is a can of coffee! A can of Café du Monde coffee from New Orleans! Wonderful news! But maybe it's not your "real" coffee, the coffee you use every day. It's sort of in the wrong location, in this closet near the back door, away from the more active part of the kitchen, and it's unopened. Maybe it's for a special occasion—maybe it's for an annual at-home Mardi Gras celebration. Or maybe you got it on a romantic trip to New Orleans and are saving it for your anniversary. Is it all right to open this, or not? Would that make me a bad person?

A moot point, I guess, since there are no filters in here anyway.

I want to go home. May I go home now? I'm sorry I'm so snippy. Who am I to be snippy about anything? My own freezer is so frightening, so full of unloved Butterfingers from Halloweens past, that I don't even like to look in there; Jeffrey Dahmer could have stored a head or a fibula in the back of it, for all I know.

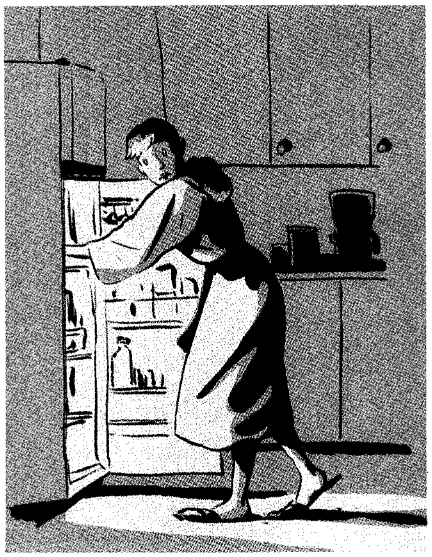
I'm just uncomfortable here. I'm uncomfortable not in my own home. I'm uncomfortable in my own home also, but that's not what I'm trying to say.

I'm trying to say that I just don't think I can do this—this being a weekend guest, this protracted socializing. It's a strain on me. You think I'm devil-may-care and chatty and entertaining enough for an entire weekend, but really I am not. Really, I am just not up to this.

What are we going to do after breakfast? Go into town and shop? Where is town? Is there coffee there? Maybe I could go there now and get some coffee, a nice hot paper cup of it, just to tide me over.

Am I allowed to take your car? I have no idea. I don't know if I would return from town and hear you say, "Of course it's all right to take the car! Don't be silly!," or find you sitting at the kitchen table trying to smile but feeling hurt, surprised by my presumption. "No, no, it's fine. Did you have a good time?" you might say, with tight little smiles, and I could tell it wasn't fine at all.

After we go shopping or whatever, are we going to have lunch? I don't like to admit it, but I'm not one of those people who say, "I had a big breakfast, so I'll just grab a snack for lunch." I never just grab a snack for lunch. I like to have a big breakfast and a big lunch and a big dinner. But I can't figure out how to say that to you in so many words.



ZOHAR LAZAR

What I'll do is offer to take you out for lunch. That way I know I'll get a square meal in before dinner. I hope it doesn't cost that much, though, because I'm taking you out for dinner, as we discussed. I feel poor already.

Did someone say something last night about playing bridge today if it rained? I seem to remember the husband in that nice couple who came for dinner suggesting it—it moved me how you could tell that even though he was talking about playing bridge as if he thought it was a campy idea, something our parents might do, he really wanted to do it. And did I say something like "Oh, I don't know how to play bridge, but I'd love to learn!"? If I did, that's because I felt sorry for him. Also, I think I was kind of drunk at the time.

I would not love to learn. I would hate to learn. Bridge is unlearnable by me. You have to have a partner and strategy and write things down on little pads of paper and somehow store the previous moves of others in your memory, like a squirrel storing nuts, for use later. It sounds like a job. A job I would get fired from on the first day, before lunch.

I can't do games of skill, only chance. Games with dice. I like dice. You rolls 'em and you takes your chances!

I like moving my guy around the board. It's pleasant. My guy or my little Hershey's Kiss-shaped plastic piece; I try to get a green one, because green is my favorite color. But I don't mind if green is your favorite color, too—you can have the green. I'll take the color no one else wants, usually orange. I don't care. I'm not very competitive, as you can tell.

What I like best are games of chance where there is also a story. For example, I like Monopoly—now, there's a game that involves hardly any skill; you only have to know what every Manhattan toddler knows: buy, don't rent.

I'm also worried that, after our games-playing, we may run out of things to talk about at dinner tonight. If we do, I can tell a story. I have three stories: the time I met Philip Roth and he was mean to me, the time our cat ate our hamster, and the time I think I had E.S.P. for a month. Altogether, they take about forty minutes to tell, so I hope you will interrupt me a lot. Otherwise I will have run out of things to say and it will be only eight-thirty.

I guess I don't have to tell you my feelings about the crossword puzzle, if you're planning on doing that on Sunday morning. Even if I could do it, I just can't see the point. People always say that doing the crossword keeps your brain sharp, but it seems only to keep your brain sharp in the parallel reality of Crossword Puzzle Land, a land in which EHumperdinck is still a star and it actually matters that you know that Yale's motto is "Lux et Veritas." And I'm sorry, but I don't like it when people sit there in front of you and do the puzzle in pen. It makes me lonely.

So I'm a little worried about Sunday as well.

Maybe I should just take my meals in my room until it's time to go home. You could leave them on a tray outside my bedroom door.

Speaking of leaving, do you want me to strip the bed before I go? Maybe I'll fashion a rope out of the sheets, like in the movies, and slip out my bedroom window, quietly.

No time like the present.

Please forgive me. This is just too hard. Thank you very much for having me. I'm sorry. I really am. Goodbye. ♦

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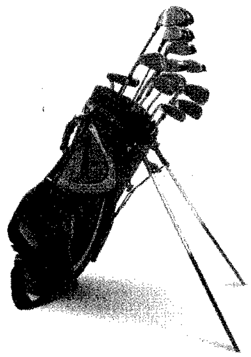

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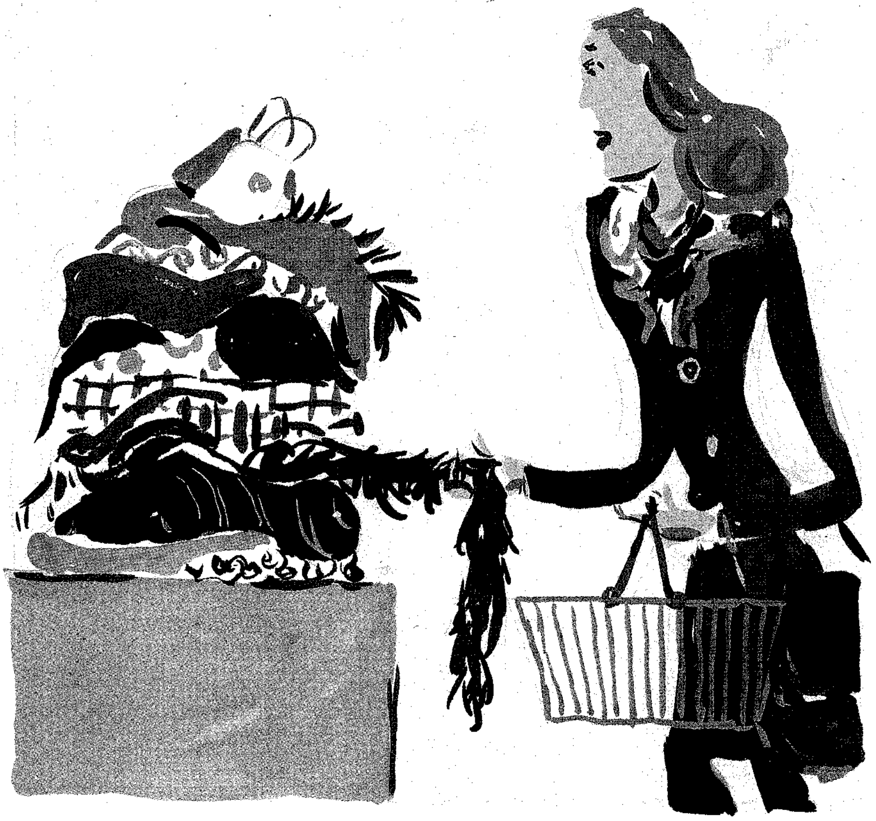
ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

The dish on discount stores.

BY PATRICIA MARX



Have you heard that this season sixty per cent off is the new black?

O.K., so you're trying your best to scrimp. You dilute your bottled water with tap water. You give up premium cable for shadow puppetry. You switch from hard-boiled eggs to soft-boiled to save five minutes' worth of carbon debits. You quit your job in order to eliminate commuting costs. You've sold your children, and might even sacrifice the jet share. And now: what are you going to wear to the recession? I trust that during this grim holiday season you won't be putting on anything that hasn't been discounted at least as much as the Dow. Have you heard that sixty per cent off is the new black?

If you type "discount" and "New York" into Google, you will be presented with 57,944 local business results. Most of them seem to be the Vitamin Shoppe. The fellow who answered the phone at Discount Locksmith had no idea why the firm is labelled thus, and whoever picked up at A & B Discount was too busy to talk, because he was selling newspapers and magazines, at full price. There is Chocolates Discount Store, but it traffics only in perfume, sunglasses, and cheap jewelry. (After some strained back-and-forth with an employee, I discovered that a Mr. Chocolate is the owner; 1402 St. Nicholas Avenue, at West 180th Street.)

Notwithstanding the above, New York is rich with discount outlets where you can pick up a bargain, sometimes right off an unswept floor. At these stores, you can buy fine-label garments at

JEAN-PHILIPPE DELHOMME

prices significantly lower than those at department stores and boutiques. Wait—that was in the old days, when consumers consumed. Now that shoppers are playing hard to get, even the most high-end establishments are apocalyptically unloading their goods at below M.S.R.P., the manufacturer's suggested retail price, which, of course, includes the amount that the manufacturer marks something up so that the retailer can mark it down, so that the shopper can believe he or she is getting a steal. But even if Barneys or Bergdorf limbos lower than usual in the upcoming months, the best storewide and year-round deals will nevertheless be found at off-price retailers, where the inventory is made up of overstock, samples, cancellations, closeouts, and pristine items ominously labelled "slightly irregular" (what do they know that we don't?).

Are you certain that you have what it takes to shop discount? Do you have the patience to excavate heaps of finery that is frayed, smudged, stretched, faded, pilled, ripped, mis-sized, unstylish, out of season, or never was in season? The grit to see yourself in the glare of fluorescent lighting—if you can even find a mirror? The confidence to have an opinion without being told what it is by an encouraging salesperson? Do you thrill to the ambience of the Department of Motor Vehicles?

Century 21 is the Louvre of cut-rate department stores—four floors of designer wear, an enormous annex for shoes, and droves of European tourists, many of them sightseers on their way to or from Ground Zero. Because it is a few blocks away from the courthouses in lower Manhattan, Century 21 (22 Cortlandt Street) is a lunchtime favorite for people on jury duty who are hoping to snag a haute thing or two at criminal prices—a pair of Martin Margiela navy crushed-velvet jeans, perhaps ($219.99, originally $825), or an aqua zebra-patterned horsehair camisole designed by Rohka ($299.99, originally $1,470). Of course, what is here today at these sorts of places may well be gone tomorrow, so I'd advise stopping by yesterday. The supply of raccoon ushankas might ride out the season, though. There was an abundance of them the day I visited, maybe because so many hat-wearers agree with the customer who said, "They feel exactly like my dog, so it'd make me kind of sad to walk around in one" ($179.97, originally $375).

Filene's Basement wasn't the first place to flog cheap wares below street level (40 East 14th Street and various other locations). In 1885, Marshall Field's flagship store, in Chicago, opened a "budget floor" in its cellar, offering embroideries, cloaks, silks, and such, at realistic prices. The plan was to lure into the store a less wealthy clientele, who would eventually trespass upstairs and buy the expensive stuff. A few years later, in 1908, Filene's loosely adapted this idea and contrived its Automatic Bargain Basement in order to unload surplus from their shop proper. Filene's Basement frequently cuts the prices on items that remain unsold. The formula, as explained to me by a salesman at the Chelsea branch, has to do with yellow tickets and purple tickets. "It's very confusing," he said. "You'll have to come to Filene's frequently to study the system, if you really want to understand it." No, thank you. Nonetheless, the Michael Kors four-hundred-thread-count sheet sets are a nice buy at $39.99 (seventy-five per cent off), and anyone whose initials are R.L.L. should appreciate the handsome Ralph Lauren nightshirts with monogrammed breast pocket ($39.99, reduced from $62). What I love most about the place, however, is the spectacular view of Union Square from the floor-to-ceiling windows on the Basement's fourth floor.

The collection of footwear at DSW (Designer Shoe Warehouse), situated in the same cheapo depot as the aforementioned Filene's, is so prodigious that you will enter into a state of hypnosis as you shamble along the aisles. Snap out of it. There's work to do. Samples of shoes and boots are displayed on counters, and it's up to you to root around for your size in the jumble of stock below. But make sure you don't get clobbered by a sack full of boxed shoes. DSW provides giant shopping bags to customers, who load them up with prospective purchases before sitting down to try on the goods on one of the (scarce) benches, curiously positioned in places that are obstinately in the way of foot traffic. There is a chance that you might come across a pair of Chloé peep-toe pumps, slashed from $545 to $199, but, if so, I hope you wear

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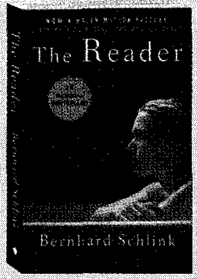

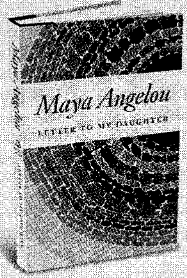

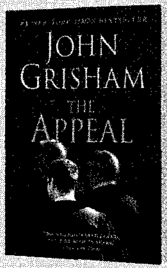

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a size 8½ and like yellow. And never mind the time it takes to find them. So what if you took half a day? That's a half day you didn't buy something not on sale.

Can anything be discounted more than the word "designer"? Once, the term referred to pieces created by foreigners with household names (Chanel, Dior, Balenciaga). Then came Americans with two names (Calvin Klein, Donna Karan). Next, words were added to the names (Oleg Cassini Sport, Marc by Marc Jacobs). Now there are no names, merely signs in designated areas of the outlet floor that boldly decree all goods in the vicinity "Designer."

Hey, where are all the salespeople at Daffy's (1311 Broadway, at 34th Street—downstairs from the D.M.V.—and other locations)? Evidently, they have been trained to avoid all customer contact. Is the sign in the rest room that warns "No napping" directed at the employees? Or is it for the toddlers who shop here, knowing that Daffy's is tops for European children's attire? Wouldn't that cunning white knit jacket with subtle embroidery be just the thing for a little one to spit up on ($59, reduced from $200)? And surely every baby needs gold cowboy boots to throw a tantrum in ($39). For grownups, the hosiery selection can't be beat, particularly Candy Girl's Aztec-like-patterned *chaussettes* with pompoms dangling from the tops ($3.99). A men's paper-thin distressed-leather jacket from Alexander Julian is snazzy ($99, reduced from $395). Canadians, there's even something for you: diamonds from the Great White North. An 18k.-white-gold engagement ring with a one-carat rock is $6,999, reduced from $13,999 (presumably in U.S. currency). And that's not all: the girdle of each diamond is laser-inscribed with a maple leaf and a "unique identification number." Would you like the salesclerk to remove that diamondiferous piece of jewelry from the vitrine so you can examine it close up? For insurance purposes, you must present photo identification.

Did you know that Loehmann's (101 Seventh Avenue, at 17th Street) will provide you with a personal shopper? All you have to do is make an appointment, although they welcome walk-ins. Without any professional guidance whatsoever, I spotted a Moschino "Great Hits Spring/Summer 2007" evening bag that looks like two 45-r.p.m. records stitched together with yarn ($244.98, reduced from $875). Here, as well as at every other discount-o-rama, you can pick up high-quality umbrellas, such as Totes, for about $10 to $17 (originally twenty-some dollars). And you can't do better for cashmere-lined leather gloves, particularly if you have only one hand (Portolano gloves, $17.99 to $22.99, originally $40 to $48).

T. J. Maxx (620 Sixth Avenue, at 18th Street), a sibling of Marshall's, is the nation's largest off-price retailer of apparel and home fashion, but Oscar and Mark, a gastronomically inclined couple, go there for D. L. Jardine's Olé Chipotle Salsa and Dip ($3.99, reduced from $6). How many jars? Every last one. The sauce is—was—next to the cranberry butter ($4, reduced from $7), which is not far from the Italian ceramic plates in écru or rusty red ($12.99, reduced from $24) and the astonishingly wide selection of hotsy-totsy cookware. The half-price Le Creuset pots are seconds, so check that the colorful enamel on the Dutch oven is not chipped before you fall in love.

At Syms, as you may have heard, "an educated consumer is our best customer" (400 Park Avenue, at 55th Street). Could this explain the dearth of shoppers in this staid, old-fashioned store the day I was there? Was everyone at home reading the early works of Nathaniel Hawthorne? Or did the lack of frenzy have to do with—oops, you know—the economy? In either case, it was very pleasant to survey the tidy racks of suits and sports coats—no finery trampled on the floor!—in what must be the widest, though not the most hip, selection of discounted men's apparel in town. What did I see besides accommodating salesclerks? A black-and-gray houndstooth cashmere jacket by Bill Blass was $155, reduced from $350; a camel-hair overcoat from Polo Ralph Lauren (Ralph Lauren's second-tier line) was $239, reduced from $400; a Joseph Abboud gray pin-striped suit in a lightweight wool was $299, reduced from $699. A tailor is on hand. The store has a women's and a children's department as well. And note the jazzy reading glasses in the accessories section—frames patterned in orange leopard and black-and-pink floral, and, yes, spectacles that look just like the ones a certain person wore when gazing at Russia ($7.99 to $19.99).

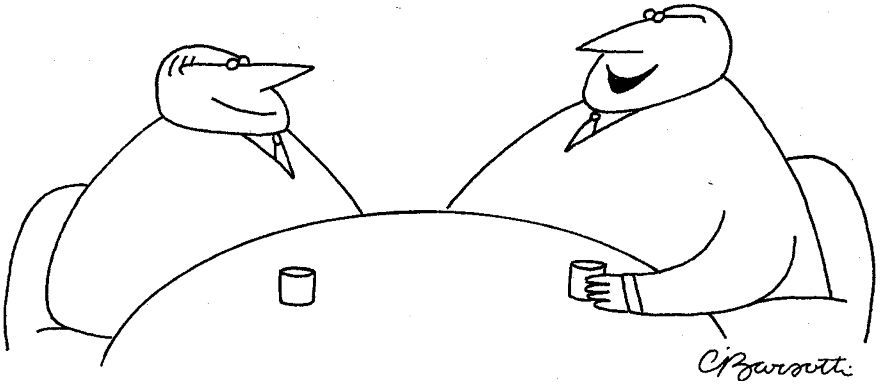
Now seems the right time to expound on my philosophy of life. But first a story. Many years ago, I invited several friends to a party, requesting that each bring her biggest shopping fiasco, which she could then swap for someone else's *objet de regret*. The underlying theory was that one person's clothing disaster was another person's bonanza. Not so, it seems. We all agreed, for instance, that my stretchy Glen-plaid cowboy shirt was a global debacle. Of more relevance to our purposes, consider this: with the exception of one guest, whose father had given her a strapless sequinned gown, everyone's mistake had been a sale item, brought home because its price was persuasive, not because it was a must-have.

Let this be a warning to you: Beware the price tag with crossed-out numerals that plot the downward journey of a thing from thirty per cent to seventy-five per cent off. No matter what your friends who used to work at Lehman Brothers tell you, this is not money you earn. In fact, do not so much as peek at the price tag without first looking into your soul—I mean, your closet. Then ask yourself: Am I ever going to wear a three-tiered aqua almost-satin skirt hemmed with lace (Daffy's, 125 East 57th Street; $13.99)? Do I need another black cashmere sweater, even though this one would be a "great foundation for a necklace," as I heard a woman say to her friend about a cotton/angora long-sleeved T-shirt that didn't fit but that she was buying anyway (Filene's, 2220 Broadway, at 79th Street; $14.99, reduced from $40)? Do I long for a tote bag that looks as if it had been woven out of gimp by a kid at summer camp (Calypso Outlet, 407 Broome Street; $89, reduced from $435)?

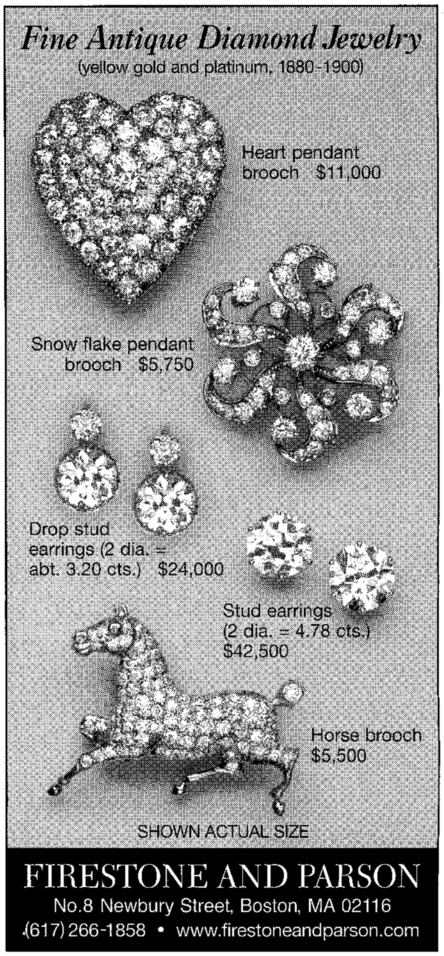
Do you swear you can't live without it? Well, then and only then can you mull over the dollars and cents. What does this have to do with my philosophy of life? Simply this: Do not be seduced by the deal. It's better to spend a lot on a getup you love than a fraction of that on something, or even five of those somethings, that you'll never bother to take out of the shopping bag. By the way, this advice also applies to discount love interests. And half-price sushi.

Not every path to the bargain basement involves an escalator. Gabay's is on the ground floor, in a tiny space chockablock with pocketbooks, shoes, coats, sweaters, dresses, and the like (225 First Avenue, at 13th Street). "We're more personal and homey than Daffy's and Loehmann's," said Joel Morrow, the co-owner, with his cousin, of this showroom, which carries glut from some of your favorite department stores that start with "B," and a few private labels. The cousins are grandsons of the shop's founder, Sam Gabay, a Turk who, in 1905, came to the Lower East Side, where he peddled extras from garment factories before opening an outlet, in 1940. The shop specializes in shoes (loads of Bettye Muller) and pocketbooks (Lanvin, Valentino, Nancy Gonzales, Gucci, Prada), but the day I stopped in there seemed to be a preponderance of parkas. An Authier off-white fur-trimmed down coat was especially chic ($385, originally $1,100). In the men's section, there are items from Bruno Magli, Brioni, Armani, Davide Cenci, and Charvet. Prices are thirty-five to seventy-five per cent off the original. "But we'll negotiate," Morrow said. "We want to move merchandise."

What are the shrewdest strategies for getting rid of stock? You may have noticed that not too many merchants now-



"Darwinian Socialism—by God, we may be onto something."



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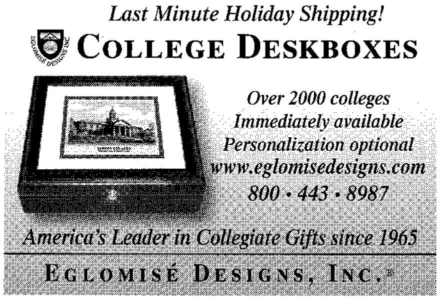

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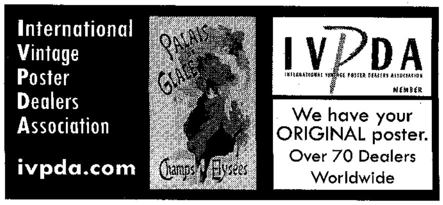

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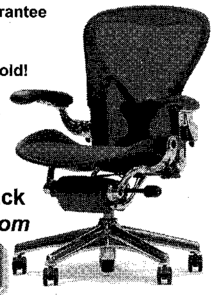

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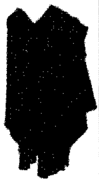

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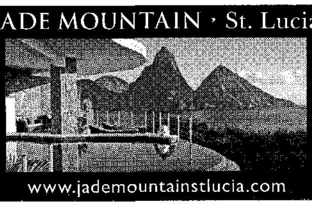

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adays are hot to use the Crazy Eddie "We will not be undersold" approach. This isn't because Crazy Eddie's prices were "IN-SA-A-A-A-ANE!" or because Eddie ended up a convicted criminal. Rather, the meet- or beat-the-competition model, economists have shown, merely discourages price-dropping. Here's how it works (or, actually, does not work): Let's say two stores, Cheapskate Delight and Three Scrooges, sell famous-name cashmere sweaters. If Cheapskate Delight promises to match any price, then it takes away the incentive for Three Scrooges to decrease its price, because it will end up selling fewer sweaters at a lower price. So how do they get rid of the damn sweaters? As Mara Kelly, a Loehmann's spokesperson, told me, "Merchandise is simply marked down until it sells."

There is a one-block patch of SoHo that could be called Little Calypso, given its efflorescence of Calypso branches. In addition to the full-priced boutique and the housewares shop (both of which had drastic sales the day I visited), there is an outlet with cut-rate frocks from the current season as well as a mini-mart called Sample Sale, which carries ridiculously cheap stuff from seasons of yore (191 Lafayette Street, 199 Lafayette Street, 407 Broome Street, and 424 Broome Street). Since there is no discernible difference between the old and the new—it all looks like regalia for Marin County hippies who summer in Kauai—you might as well start your shopping spree at the site with the samples. Here silk shirts go for $5, and slouchy dresses in Day-Glo colors run from $19 to $29—if that is indeed what they are. Concerning a cottony body sleeve with elasticized smocking ($49, down from $165), a mother and daughter had this conversation at the Outlet: "Is it a skirt?" "No, it's a dress." "It looks more like a top, honey."

"We've *benefitted* from these unfortunate times," said Dagmar Galdi, the assistant manager of the ABC Carpet and Home Warehouse Outlet, in the southeast Bronx (1055 Bronx River Avenue). Hmm. I was one of a mere handful of non-employees wandering around this tri-level three-hundred-and-twenty-thousand-square-foot furnituropolis, but, then again, it was a weekday. Drop by on a weekend, Galdi assured me, and the place is densely populated with lovers of four-hundred-and-six-thread-count Italian linens (flat sheet, $133.50, down from $245) black-walnut highboy chests ($4,700, down from $5,835), tessellated terra-cotta-colored soap dishes ($52, down from $75), and weatherproof marble Buddhas ($595; who could mark down Buddha and expect to be enlightened?). On the third floor, in the rug department, there are Orientals (from $399), broadlooms (from $22 a yard, installed), multicolored shags ($749, down from $1,349), cowhide rugs ($399-$749), sisal mats ($99-$299), and four-by-six rugs made from stitched-together wool felt ($899, down from $1,599).

As things get darker for everyone else, they keep getting brighter for Jack. What? You don't know Jack? I don't know him, either, but if he has anything to do with Jack's 99 Cent Stores (16 East 40th Street and other locations) then he and his colleagues—owners of Dollar Tree, Dollar General, Family Dollar, and 99 Cents Only—are in the right business. Shares of dollar stores have jumped this year. Possibly the first chain to offer stuff at fixed prices was F. W. Woolworth's (former headquarters, 233 Broadway), a.k.a. the five-and-dime, which was founded in 1878, in Watertown, New York. Adjusting for inflation, this institution would today be called the dollar-twelve-and-two-twenty-four. Except that, after many changes of identity, it is now Foot Locker.

Anyway, at Jack's place, for roughly half the price of a subway ride, you can take home a package of pita bread, an extension cord, Little Debbie banana-marshmallow pies, a home pregnancy kit, shoe insoles, a yellow duck shower curtain, makeup remover, Cherry Blossom bath treats, floor protectors, potato knishes, mousetraps, party-favor leis, reading glasses, Q-Tips, or a pair of plastic shoes. But, please, keep in mind my philosophy of life, even though I sometimes forget to act according to its tenets. In the course of researching this piece, I have somehow acquired more packing tape than even Santa Claus could use. Remember, it's not really a bargain if you have to buy an extra house to store your bargains in. (Authentic Java House, approximately twelve feet by twelve feet, with red tile roof, Indonesian-style patio, and a lot of pillows on the floor, at the ABC Warehouse Outlet, for $14,000, reduced from $20,000.) ♦

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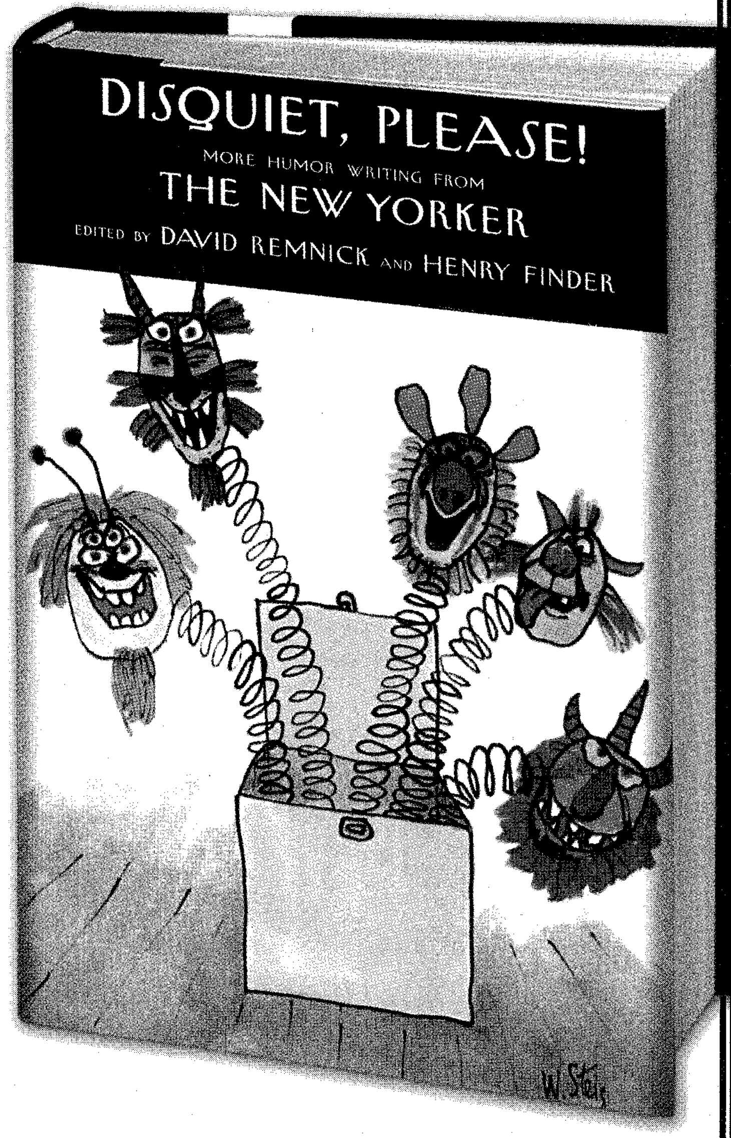
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OUTSIDE AGITATOR

Naomi Klein and the new new left.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

The marquee outside the Bloor Cinema, in Toronto, advertised "The Last Mistress" at four, "Naomi Klein—the Shock Doctrine" at seven, and "Little Shop of Horrors" at nine-thirty. It was a warmish night. The falafel shop next door was doing a brisk business. A line of people holding tickets to the Naomi Klein event stretched to the end of the block and around the corner. Outside the entrance to the cinema, a middle-aged man and an elderly woman paced up and down selling copies of *Socialist Action* for a dollar. (The September issue included articles about capitalism's contradictions, class war in Bolivia, and a commentary by Mumia Abu-Jamal—a regular feature.)

"We apologize for starting late, but it's typical activist time, so I'm sure you're used to it," a young woman organizer said from the stage. The young woman wore a black necklace, black jeans, and black hoop earrings. She urged the audience to fight racism and poverty, and to work for education, international solidarity, justice for immigrants and refugees, and solidarity with Palestine and with the Mohawk of Tyendinaga and the Algonquin of Barriere Lake, on whose behalf the fundraiser that night was being held. She squinted into the lights. "I'm glad you can't see the audience from here," she said, "because I don't think I've ever spoken in front of eight hundred and fifty people except at a protest, and then you can always dissolve into a chant." She consulted her notes. "To a different audience—to those that hold capital and power in this society—Naomi Klein's words and her ideas are seen as a serious threat," she said. "Her words are a source of inspiration . . . for those of us who were and are being radicalized by the anti-globalization, anti-colonial, and anti-poverty movements and the demands to change the system totally and completely."

Klein ascended the stage. "It's been an eventful few hours," she said, smiling. The first bailout package announced by Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson had been voted down that afternoon by the House. "The President went on television and informed us that there would be Armageddon, essentially, if they didn't get this deal . . . but it didn't work!" she went on, over rowdy clapping. She was wearing dark jeans tucked into tall brown boots, a crisp white shirt, and a long black blazer. She was dressed for a fox hunt. She looked terrific.

She had spent the day curled up on the blue sofa in her living room, watching CNN while she waited restlessly to hear what would happen in Washington. She fortified herself with cups of coffee and a smoothie. She checked her iPhone for messages from an economist friend who was keeping her posted on what was going on behind the scenes. She followed the Dow as it pitched downward, thinking how ridiculous it was for Paulson to believe that he could control it. "This is politicians acting like traders," she said, staring at the television. "A government shouldn't play the market—it should *govern*."

The past couple of weeks had been a giddy time. Since her book "The Shock Doctrine" was published last year, Klein, now thirty-eight, has become the most visible and influential figure on the American left—what Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky were thirty years ago. She speaks every few days, all over the world, and hundreds of people turn up to hear her. They visit her Web site and subscribe to her newsletter and send her passionate fan mail. She has become an icon's icon: Radiohead and Laurie Anderson promote her books to their fans; John Cusack's comedy "War, Inc." was inspired by her reporting from Baghdad. The Mexican film director Alfonso Cuarón felt so strongly about "The Shock Doctrine" that he made a short promotional film about it for free. Now, suddenly, she was in demand everywhere. The economic crisis had looked at first like a textbook enactment of her "shock doctrine" theory, and everyone wanted her to go on TV and explain it.

The central thesis of the book is that capitalism and democracy, free markets and free people, do not, as we've been told, go hand in hand. On the contrary, capitalism—at least fundamentalist capitalism, of the type promoted by the late economist Milton Friedman and his "Chicago School" acolytes—is so unpopular, and so obviously harmful to everyone except the richest of the rich, that its establishment requires, at best, trickery and, at worst, terror and torture. Friedman believed that markets perform best when freed from government interference, so he advocated getting rid of tariffs, subsidies, minimum-wage laws, public housing, Social Security, financial regulation, and licensing requirements, including those for doctors—indeed, virtually every measure devised to protect people from the market's harsh logic. Klein argues that the only circumstance in which a population would accept Friedman-style reforms is when it is in a state of shock, following a crisis of some sort—a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, a war. A person in shock regresses to a childlike state in which he longs for a parental figure to take control; similarly, a population in a state of shock will hand exceptional powers to its leaders, permitting them to destroy the regulatory functions of government.

Friedman once observed that much of the time societies are too paralyzed by the "tyranny of the status quo" to accept real reform, and that only a crisis can convince people that the way things are done needs to change. This idea is not particularly controversial. But from Friedman's words

Responding to the financial crisis, Klein says, "This is a progressive moment: it's ours to lose." Photograph by Platon.

Klein concludes that the Chicago School is "a movement that prays for crisis the way drought-struck farmers pray for rain." Worse, Friedmanites are impatient—sometimes too impatient to sit around praying for acts of God. Natural disasters are tricky to engineer, but coups and terror are always possible. "Some of the most infamous human rights violations of this era," she writes, "which have tended to be viewed as sadistic acts carried out by antidemocratic regimes"—Pinochet's in Chile, for instance, or the Argentinean junta—"were in fact either committed with the deliberate intent of terrorizing the public or actively harnessed to prepare the ground for the introduction of radical free-market 'reforms.' "

Klein first formulated her thesis in 2004, when she was reporting in Baghdad and noticed that Paul Bremer's goal seemed to be to establish a perfect capitalist state in Iraq while its population was still reeling from the "shock and awe" bombing. Then she noticed that soon after the tsunami in Sri Lanka the coastline that had been inhabited by fishermen was being sold off to hotels. Then she noticed that Friedman had suggested taking advantage of Hurricane Katrina to replace New Orleans's disastrous public schools with charter schools. The pattern was striking. But now that a shock had shaken Washington itself, something slightly different seemed to be going on. On the one hand, the initial reaction to the economic crisis followed her theory—the shock (the bank failures and the market's nosedive) had inspired the government to attempt to seize unprecedented power (seven hundred billion dollars with no strings attached), claiming that in such a crisis everyone should simply trust it to do the right thing, even though the actions it wanted to take would seem to enrich the wealthiest at the expense of everybody else. That was the textbook part. But the plan wasn't working. Constituents wrote thousands of outraged letters, and bloggers wrote about how this felt familiar, like the aftermath of September 11th, and how the bailout was the economic equivalent of the Patriot Act. It was just as she had written at the end of the book: memory was shock's antidote. (Another difference, of course, was that the government wanted to enact not Friedman-style reforms but the opposite: enormous interference in the market. Still, since the point of this interference was to bail out banks, this difference did not strike Klein as of much importance.)

"Americans remembered that they thought Rudy Giuliani was their daddy after September 11th, which was why they're a little less inclined to say that Paulson and Goldman Sachs were going to take care of them this time," Klein told the audience at the Bloor Cinema. "I think actually their biggest mistake with the bailout was how short it was. It's just two pages and three paragraphs, and so the weirdest thing happened: people read it." Everyone laughed. "It sounded like a coup."

She went on, "It's worth thinking about what the right has been doing for the past thirty-five years as a counterrevolution that has been waged against our victories." The New Deal is usually told as a history of F.D.R., she said, but we don't talk enough about the pressure from below. Neighborhoods organized, and when their evicted neighbors' furniture was put on the streets they moved it back into their homes. It was that kind of direct action that won victories like rent control, public housing, and the creation of Fannie Mae. The other thing that's important to remember, she said, is that the organizers were a threat—of socialist revolution—and it was that which allowed F.D.R. to say to Wall Street, "We have to compromise, or else we've got a revolution on our hands." Now, these market shocks are opportunities for the same reason that the crash was in the thirties, because we are seeing the failures of laissez-faire before our eyes. "It's time to say, '*Your model failed,*' " she said. "This is a progressive moment: it's ours to lose."

ÉLITE career counselling
occupational TESTING
B. Smaller

"There's a lot I want to experience, but not a lot I actually want to do."

Klein was born in 1970, but the political stories in which she places herself all begin in the thirties. The thirties and forties were the last time in America, she feels, that social movements were strong enough to force radical economic change in a progressive direction. They were also the last time that a certain kind of grand, bold political hope existed in her family—the last time before events combined to extinguish all thoughts, among Kleins, of utopia.

Her paternal grandparents, Anne and Philip, met at the Jack London Club—a leftist artists' club—in Newark, New Jersey, sometime in the thirties. (Philip's older brother, Sol, was more committed—he moved to the Soviet Union after the revolution and never came back.) Philip wanted to be a painter, and in 1936 he got a job as an animator for Disney. He worked on "Fantasia" and "Snow White" and "Pinocchio." Disney animators had been trying to organize themselves in secret since the early thirties, but they didn't pull it off until after the bonuses they were promised for "Snow White" failed to materialize. In the late spring of 1941, they went on strike. Philip and Anne, ardent believers in the union, lived in a tent across the street from the studio, cooking over open fires and manning the picket line. Their first son, Michael, Naomi's father, was then three, and lived with them in the tent part of the time. The strike was settled in September, but a few months after that Philip was fired for being an agitator. In 1942, he and Anne moved back to New Jersey, and he went to work in a shipyard.

At the time they were ruining their lives for politics, Anne and Philip were experiencing the beginnings of a crisis of faith. Stalin had signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: that was the first betrayal. Then came news of gulags in the Soviet Union. By the time of Khrushchev's "secret speech" of 1956, in which he denounced the cult of Stalin and its consequences, Philip and Anne, along with many others, had bitterly abandoned Communism. They held on to their core beliefs in social justice and racial equality, and taught their sons to believe in those things, but apart from brief forays—Anne took ten-year-old Michael canvassing for the Progressive Party in 1948, and marched on Washington in support of the Rosenbergs—they withdrew from politics. They began to spend time at Nature Friends (later Camp Midvale)—a retreat near Paterson, founded in the twenties as a place where workers of all races could congregate and enjoy nature. Nature Friends became their life. Philip built a house nearby, and Anne grew her own vegetables. They went to see leftist singers like Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson and Woody Guthrie. Philip sought to revive his early ambition of becoming a painter, but all his figures looked like Disney cartoons. He tried sculpting in metal, and after a while this brought him a measure of satisfaction.

In high school, Michael Klein was in the band and the student council and was the captain of the swim team, but he led a double life. He'd been sent to Socialist summer camp, and his real friends were other red-diaper babies who lived in New York, with whom he could discuss his home life without fear of exposure. It was difficult and frightening to be the child of Communists. One of his most vivid childhood memories was seeing buses arrive at Camp Midvale in the early fall of 1949 and disgorge dozens of bloodied people who had gone to a Paul Robeson concert and had been attacked with rocks and bats by a local mob. The electrocution of the Rosenbergs, in 1953, which left their two boys orphaned at the ages of six and ten, terrified Michael, who was not much older.

Michael Klein never deviated from the beliefs of his parents, but, like them, he stayed away from political parties. In medical school, he protested against the Vietnam War and joined Physicians for Social Responsibility. When he was drafted, he didn't sign the statement about not belonging to organizations with Communist ties, so the Army held a hearing to decide whether he was loyal enough to serve. Meanwhile, he had met a young activist filmmaker from Philadelphia named Bonnie Sherr, and got her pregnant. In the middle of his draft negotiations, she saw a documentary about American soldiers dropping napalm on civilian populations, commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. She said, "If a Canadian government agency can produce a film like this, we should get married and run away to Canada." So they did.

They ended up in Montreal. Michael worked as a pediatrician in a public hospital. Bonnie had studied film in California—the first film she shot was of César Chávez's first march in Sacramento. In Canada, she made a film in which welfare recipients interviewed one another about health care; she made a series of films about the community organizer Saul Alinsky; later, she made a film about women peace activists, at Greenham Common and in the Soviet Union. ("I had pretty simplistic political ideas about dialogue," she says now. "You know, an enemy is somebody whose stories you haven't heard.") In 1980, she set out to make a feminist film about sex, to be titled "Celebration," but instead made "Not a Love Story," about pornography. She was involved in a feminist film group at the National Film Board called Studio D. Her friends at Studio D were into solstices and female spirituality, and at one point she confided to her daughter that she wanted to be a witch. "My mother was always saying things like that," Klein recalled later in her mother's memoir. "She always wanted to be more of a hippie earth mother than she actually was. . . . The Joan Baez fantasy ran deep. It would resurface every few years, and she would learn to play 'Greensleeves' again."

Her parents' careers, so very Canadian, give Klein's commitment to public institutions an emotional force, beyond her sense that profit distorts certain functions, such as health care. "Both of my parents lived through a honeymoon period in the public sector," she says. "My mother and Studio D were always furious because they weren't getting the resources they thought they deserved, but from the outside perspective it was, like, Oh, my God. You were allowed to have a women's studio making films about social change within a huge public institution! And my father was able to do something similar within the health-care system, starting the birthing room at the hospital"—he admitted midwives and alternative medicine, and waged a campaign against unnecessary surgical interventions in childbirth. "It's easy to deride the idea of government in America, where people's association with the public sphere is the post office."

Naomi and her older brother, Seth, were brought up to be proud of the history of their family and of the left. "I can't tell you a time," Seth Klein says, "when I didn't simultaneously know that I really liked Disney movies and that Walt Disney was a bastard." When they drove to their cabin in Vermont on weekends, Bonnie and Michael would play tapes of a Pacifica Radio show that related American history through folk music—the story of McCarthyism through the Weavers, the civil-rights movement through the Freedom Singers. When Seth was little, he worried that all the good fights had already been fought, but Bonnie told him that she was sure he would find something that needed attending to, and from an early age he was on the lookout for what that thing might be—what fight would turn out to be his identity and his legacy. When he was in the sixth grade, his father took him to hear Helen Caldicott speak against nuclear weapons, and he decided that that was it. He started an anti-nuclear group, and after graduating he took a year off to travel around the country with the group, speaking to students.

While Seth was the good activist child, Naomi always resented being dragged to demonstrations. She found her mother's feminism repellent. "She really didn't like the way I dressed," Bonnie says. "My crowd at Studio D wore long skirts, schlumpy clothes." Naomi recalled that when she was eight or nine she spent "an entire journey through the Rockies conducting covert makeovers on everyone in the car. My father would lose the sandals and get a sharp, dignified suit, my mother a helmet hairdo and a wardrobe of smart pastel blazers, skirts and matching pumps." She fought with her parents all the time. "Since I was an impeccable liar and rarely got caught," Naomi recalled, "our fights were less about actual transgressions than about my silence, my sullenness and, as my dad was always fond of putting it, my 'refusal to be part of this family.' "

Naomi spent her adolescence in her room writing poetry or experimenting in the bathroom with makeup. Bonnie was appalled. She worried that Naomi was turning into a brat, thinking about clothes, spending time in front of the mirror. "I think we were overly concerned about the kind of typical teen-age stuff she was into," Bonnie says. "She read Judy Blume! I was beside myself. I was a feminist—I wanted my daughter to be good at math." "They had imagined themselves to be breeding a new kind of postrevolutionary child," Naomi wrote in her twenties. "Hadn't they diligently mushed their own baby food? Read *Parent Effectiveness Training*? Banned war toys and other 'gendered' play?" Bonnie says now, "I think she thought, 'What's wrong with having a good time?' And there was something in us—although I don't like to admit it—something of the overearnest, you know? We were always fighting something. There were always people who were the bad guy." In fact, it was worse than that. Naomi suffered from a kind of spiritual claustrophobia: she had glumly concluded that any path she chose in life—conformist or rebellious, lawyer or itinerant poet—would be equally hackneyed and ridiculous. And so even her parents' idea of a good time, which usually involved getting out into nature and attending to one's bodily needs under artificially primitive conditions ("another ponchoed picnic"), was to her just more proof of their irredeemable cheesiness and the vast gulf between them and herself. "All my parents wanted was the open road and a VW camper," she wrote. "That was enough escape for them. The ocean, the night sky, some acoustic guitar. . . . "

Soon after she graduated from high school, two catastrophic events erased her animus toward her parents and their politics. First, her mother had a severe stroke that initially left her quadriplegic. Naomi quit her job and spent most of the six months that Bonnie was in the hospital at her side. Then, during her first semester at the University of Toronto, a gunman killed fourteen women at the École Polytechnique in Montreal, declaring, "I hate feminists." She decided to call herself a feminist from then on.

Klein sat on a table, inside the MTV studios, in Manhattan. She swung her legs back and forth. She was wearing a long necklace and black high-heeled mini-boots. She may have made up with her parents, but in matters of style she stands firm against activism of the old school. She wears jeans, but she is groomed as flawlessly as an anchorwoman. She giggles, she makes jokes. She smiles a lot, especially onstage, though it is never clear whether she is smiling in amusement, politeness, irritation, or for some other reason. Her demeanor is friendly but guarded.

While they were waiting for the interview to start, the interviewer, a young man in a black T-shirt, asked her what she'd been doing lately. She told him that she'd been working on the movie version of "The Shock Doctrine," which was being made by the director of "Road to Guantánamo."

"Did you see 'Road to Guantánamo'?" she asked.

"No. I heard about it, though."

"It's excellent—it's intercut between interviews with the Tipton Three"—three young British men who were held in Guantánamo for two years—"and they're just, like, *blokes*, you know? The best moment in the film was when one of them suggests going to Afghanistan because they've got massive naans there. That was the reason."

The producer, a young man in jeans and an acid-lime polo shirt, appeared.

"We'll be talking about China and the Olympics, about Darfur and intervention," the interviewer said. "But also about you personally—how you became who you are—because it's a young audience that looks up to each and every person on the program. The goal is to have them want to be like that person."

"Are you going to ask me my favorite band?" she asked.

"We will, yes, I'm afraid."

"I'm going to say M.I.A., just so you know."

"That will definitely ingratiate you with the demographic," the producer said.

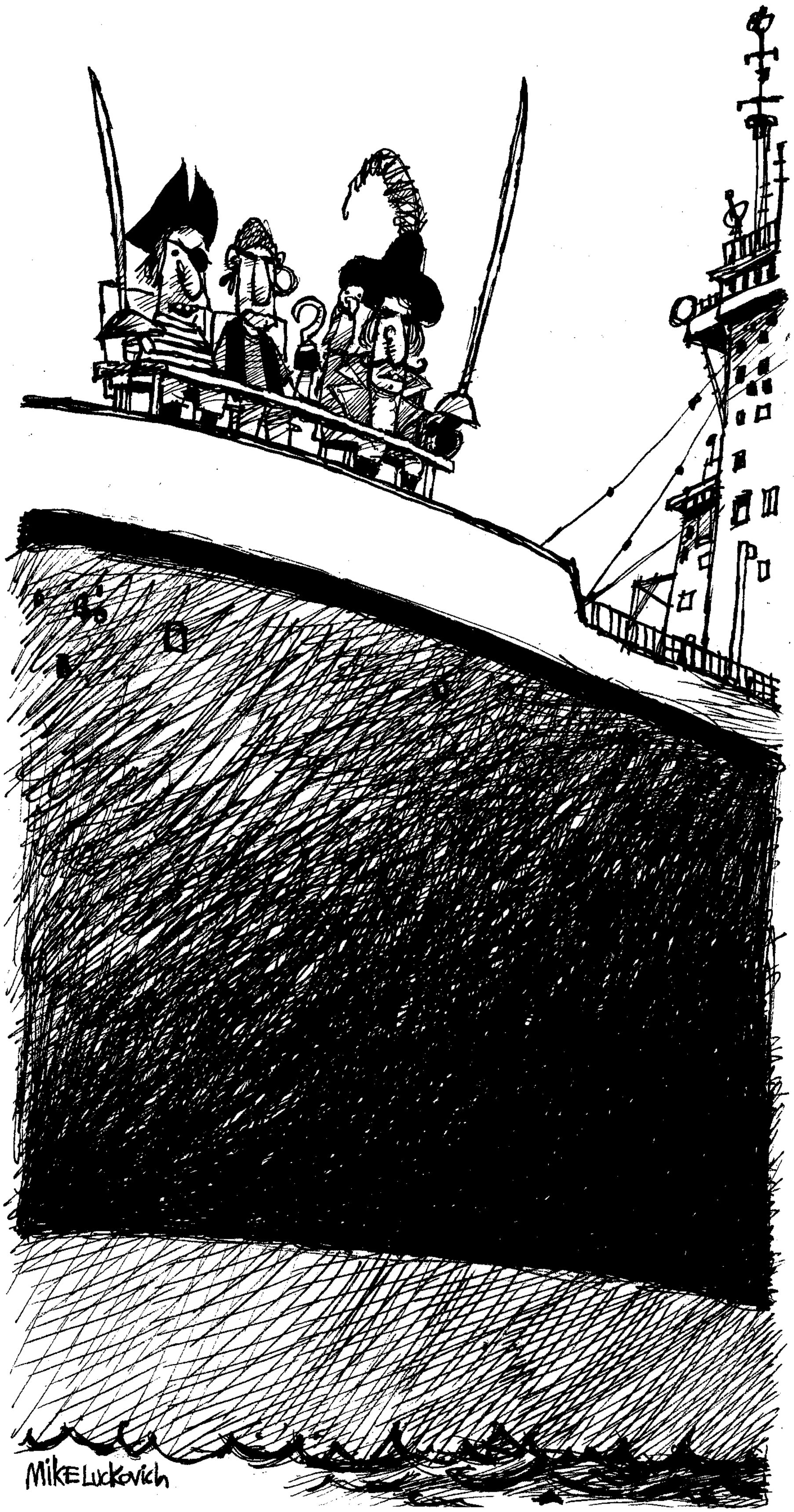
"I'm sucking up, that's why I'm here. D'you think I could get some tea?"

Klein has been a person whom young people look up to since she found herself in charge of emotional teach-ins right after the Montreal massacre. She spent most of her time in college on politics and journalism; she was the editor-in-chief of the university paper, the *Varsity*. Then, after her third year, the *Globe and Mail* offered her a job, and she dropped out of school to take it. At the age of twenty-three, she took over as the editor of *This Magazine*, the Canadian equivalent of *The Nation*. But after a little more than a year she started to get discouraged about the state of the left—she felt that it had run out of things to say, apart from being outraged by people it disagreed with—and she decided to go back to school.

When she arrived back at university in 1996, she discovered that everything had changed. During her previous stint as an undergraduate, she had spent all her time protesting the underrepresentation of women and minorities in the curriculum and the media; campus politics in 1989 had mostly meant identity politics. But students in 1996 weren't interested in identity; what they talked about was economics. At the time, corporations were starting to make inroads into schools: soft-drink companies were negotiating exclusive deals; advertisements were appearing in bathrooms. There was a feeling in the air that corporations were getting too powerful—more powerful than governments, but not accountable to anyone except their shareholders. And, at the same time that big corporations were withdrawing physically from the United States and opening factories overseas, visually, even spiritually, they were everywhere, insinuating their logos into what had once been public space. Young activists found this especially objectionable, perhaps because one of the places into which corporations insinuated themselves most effectively was youth and activism, folding mutiny into advertising so deftly that resistance seemed futile.

Klein dropped out of college again and started writing a book about the insidious new branding culture. She thought about how much she had loved shiny, plastic brand-name stuff when she was a kid—everyone had—and she concluded that a movement was doomed to hippies-only irrelevance if it condemned the longing and the pleasure that brands could create. "Soft drink and computer brands play the roles of deities in our culture," she wrote later. "They are creating our most powerful iconography, they are the ones building our most utopian monuments." She discovered that an anticorporatist movement was brewing all over the world, in response to sweatshops abroad and brand encroachment at home. By 1999, she had finished "No Logo," a book about brands and the new movement they had inspired. Then, in an extraordinary stroke of publishing luck, while "No Logo" was at the printer's, enormous crowds of protesters suddenly materialized outside a meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle. The protest seemed to come out of nowhere—or, at least, that was how it appeared to the bewildered old left—and there was "No Logo" and Klein herself to explain it.

Klein lives with her husband, Avi Lewis, in a small house in Toronto, on a quiet street. Lewis is a host of political talk shows and a maker of documentaries; this year he is covering the U.S. elections for Al Jazeera English. Their house is very tidy, free of any sort of clutter. It is furnished simply, as though on one quick trip to Crate & Barrel. It does not look lived in, and, indeed, most of the time it is not: both Lewis and Klein are on the road so much that they estimate they have spent no



"Give us a bailout and you get your ship back!"

more than two months in Toronto since they moved in, a year ago. Nonetheless, the house is important to her. "I come from such a line of wanderers that I wanted to stop wandering," Klein says. "In Montreal, the city I grew up in, there's no trace of us." (Klein's parents moved to British Columbia after Bonnie's stroke, because the weather made it easier to get around in a wheelchair; Bonnie has become a disability-rights activist. Seth also lives in British Columbia, working on poverty issues for a think tank.) "I don't like to go to the city I grew up in and feel like a stranger," Klein says. "This is Avi's city, he goes back generations here, and that's as close to roots as I'm going to get."

Although Klein and Lewis spend a lot of time apart, they make a point of preserving their dependence upon each other. Avi tries not to work when Naomi needs him. "He feeds her and takes care of her while she's writing," Bonnie says. "He edits things first." He accompanies her on her book tours whenever he can. In 2002, Klein and Lewis concluded that their only hope of spending a long stretch together was to do a joint project, and they decided to make a film. They were tired of being against things all the time, and they were always being asked what they would suggest as an alternative, so they started travelling, looking for something that they could feel good about. They settled on Argentina, and ended up making "The Take," a moving documentary about a group of laid-off workers who broke into their shuttered factory and started it up again as a collective. At the time, Buenos Aires was in turmoil, and every now and again a protest they were documenting would turn violent and the police would start shooting, and there was an ongoing discussion about what to do. Lewis wanted to run; Klein wanted to stay. "I was trying to dissuade the cowboys in our crew from putting themselves in danger," Lewis says. "I was, like, 'Just be safe, guys, it's not our country, we're here at best in a capacity of solidarity, it's not the time to die.' But Naomi said, 'Here's the principle: if something is happening and we're the only ones witnessing it, we have a responsibility to posterity.' "

Klein and Lewis agree on most political issues, but Klein seems more ready to break things; more cynical; angrier. "I think Avi is too quick to reject revolutionary movements," she says. "I think that incremental change makes sense in the Canadian context, but it doesn't necessarily make sense in the mountains of Chiapas. I don't fetishize guerrilla violence, but I think there are situations where people are justified in taking up arms. We've had fights about that." Unlike Klein, the descendant of embittered ex-Communists, Lewis comes from a distinguished political family that has always been Socialist rather than Communist, and so has kept its political faith. "My earliest memories are of conventions and election nights, seeing grownups crying or celebrating," Lewis says. "We understood in my family that we were part of a cause, a movement, and the Party, capitalized, was a big part of that."

AS I WAS SAYING

Long, thin clouds as if the sky were smoking.
I tell it to stop or share, it doesn't stop or share,
this is what happens to my requests: they rise.
When I was a kid, a neighbor man
had a few and tied a cherry bomb to a pigeon,
it flew furiously until *kaboom*. Feathers
and bits of what made the pigeon go
landed on the Smitky twins playing hopscotch,
they looked up, I looked at them looking up,
two of everything the same, as if their parents
knew the odds of needing a spare. My wife
wants to fly in a hot-air balloon. I say to her,
I'll wait here with the turtles. I try to save them
from getting squished when they cross the road.
They don't know it's a road or what a road
is for, getting away is what a road is for,
then coming back, then wondering why you came back
is what a road is for. My wife's people
are Ukrainian, beets are important to them.
I tried to arm-wrestle her father once, he said,
Why would I do that: if I beat your arm,
the rest of you will want revenge.
I never looked at it that way. Forty-two years now

The politics of the Lewis family have changed very little in the past hundred years. Avi Lewis's great-grandfather Maishe Losz was the leader of the Jewish Labor Bund, a secular Socialist party, in his small town just east of Bialystok. The Bund was anti-Bolshevik; it believed that revolution should be achieved through democratic processes, even if that meant compromise. Thus, the Bundist maxim: "It is better to go along with the masses in a not totally correct direction than to separate oneself from them and remain a purist." In 1921, fearing that he would be killed by the Red Army, Losz fled to Canada. Losz's son David Lewis became the national leader of the Canadian democratic socialist party, the New Democratic Party. The N.D.P. never formed a national government, but it came to power in the provinces: in Canada, socialism was mainstream. David Lewis persuaded the Party to delete the eradication of capitalism from its manifesto, and he crushed movement dogmatism and indiscipline. ("When in heaven's name are we going to learn that working-class politics and the struggle for power are not a Sunday-school class?" he asked.) David's son Stephen, Avi's father, also followed in the family tradition, and was elected the leader of the N.D.P. in Ontario at the age of thirty-two. (Avi's mother, Michele Landsberg, is a journalist, who is well known in Canada for her feminism and her pugnacious left-wing politics—in her columns, conservatives are always "jack-booted" or "henchmen.") When, in the late sixties,

I've tried to look at it that way. The other day,
some kids knocked a ball through our window,
one of them asked for it back, I said, Sure,
if you give me the bat. He did, then asked
for the bat, I said, If you give me the ball,
he started to hand it over when I saw understanding
bloom in his face. That never happened for me:
understanding blooming in my face. Not the way
I wanted it to. So I'll die and someone
will have to deal with what's left, the body,
the shoes, the socks. The last person on Earth
will just be dead: not buried or mourned
or missed. As with kites, I cut the string
when they're way up, because who'd want to come back.
So somewhere are all these kites, as somewhere
are all the picture frames from the camps,
and the bows from hair, and the hair itself
I saw once in a museum, some of it, in a room
all its own, as if one day the heads
would come back and think, That's where I put you,
as I do with keys when I find them in my hand.

—*Bob Hicok*

a faction called "the Waffle" threatened to splinter the Party, Stephen Lewis crushed it, just as his father had crushed factions before. For Stephen and for David, loyalty to the Party was paramount. They would not permit the left to destroy itself.

Stephen Lewis left office thirty years ago, and David Lewis died in 1981, but the Lewises are still well known and beloved in Canada. "I live in that fantasy world in which you should say what you believe in and shouldn't retreat because the electorate may not be receptive," Stephen Lewis says. "That may explain why my own leadership was one of remarkable futility, almost legendary futility." Recently, Lewis spent five years as the United Nations special envoy for H.I.V./AIDS in Africa, but his respite from campaigning has not made him quieter. "I'm more fundamentalist now," he says. "I have no patience for capitalism at all. I see now that there is almost nothing that is positive in this ugly international system, and that's why I embrace Naomi's view of the way the world works. I'm actually tired of my rhetorical outbursts—I'd like to engage in physical aggression."

"I think there is, for my parents' generation, a sense of defeat," Avi Lewis says. "They grew up in a postwar period when it seemed like the world was changeable—a welfare state had been built and had to be protected and extended. But their adult lives have encompassed a long deterioration of the standard of living for the majority of people on this continent, and as they've seen the gains of the sixties and seventies largely erased, they've started to feel more and more hopeless. Whereas Naomi and I grew up in a time when the backlash was already well under way, so we may be just as pessimistic, but we don't feel defeated, because we never had the luxury of hope."

These days, Avi Lewis looks very much like the product of his family, but this was not always so. "I rebelled furiously, but without rebelling in the most hurtful way, which would have been to rebel politically," he says. "I was a host on MuchMusic, which is our MTV. I knew that I wasn't doing politics the way I was brought up to, and I was conflicted about that. My parents would ask me, 'Are you sure you know what you're doing? I know you love music, and it's cool for you to hang out with Bowie, and you sometimes get to do a one-hour special on music and politics in South Africa, which is sort of political, but are you sure you're doing the most you can?' I was alienated from my own political inheritance. I had a tradition to fit into. I had a platform from the time I was four or five years old." It was at this point that Lewis met Klein. They were both covering the Canadian elections in 1993—he for MuchMusic, she for CBC. When Lewis met Klein, he felt that she was freer of her family than he was of his, and this somehow relieved him of the urge to run away. "I always got the feeling that Naomi was the author of her own politics," Lewis says. "And when I got close to her I started seizing the reins of my own political development."

To Klein's and Lewis's parents, it seems that the only difference between their children and their families is style. "I remember Stephen's father debating William F. Buckley when I was an undergraduate," Michele Landsberg says. "The place was packed to the rafters, and we went mad with joy when David trounced that snakelike William Buckley. Remembering David's rhetoric, a lot of it was sentimental and heartfelt old Socialist lingo, talking about the poor working man in his tattered raincoat. Naomi would use more irony, because we've gotten past our romanticism about how we change the world." But their parents never doubted what ought to be done to make the world better; Lewis and Klein are not so sure. "Naomi takes the responsibility of young people listening to her and looking up to her really, really seriously," Lewis says. "Which is precisely why she refuses to say, 'Here's the alternative, here's what we all have to line up and fight for.' Suspicion of people who know what the answer is—that's very characteristic of our generation, and that's one of the reasons I've never gone into politics. It's very difficult for both of us when people look to us for the kind of certainty that earlier generations had." One of the few political leaders whom Klein really likes is Subcommandant Marcos, the head of the Zapatistas, in Mexico, who makes a fetish of his elusiveness and doubt.

In "No Logo," Klein celebrated the anarchic formlessness of the anti-corporate protests—what she wryly termed "laissez-faire organizing." Her genera-

MANKOFF
À LA RECHERCHE DES CHEVEUX PERDUS

tion of activists was "challenging systems of centralized power *on principle*, as critical of left-wing, one-size-fits-all state solutions as of right-wing market ones," she wrote. "It is often said disparagingly that this movement lacks ideology, an overarching message, a master plan. This is absolutely true, and we should be extraordinarily thankful." These days, the movement long gone, she is not so sanguine about it. "What I was responding to at the time was people on the left who I thought were opportunistically trying to impose their solutions," she says. "I was hoping that more of an articulation would emerge in a grass-roots way, but it's not happening—I think because the entire discussion was severed on September 11th. The mainstream N.G.O.s became frightened of being associated with people who seemed quasi-terrorist, and then we started talking about war." Lewis has never been as enamored as Klein of the movement's lack of discipline, and she admits now that he may have been right. "Seeing how easy it was for everything to evaporate, without institutions taking that energy and nailing it down—we were too ephemeral," she says. "It was that experience that made me feel like we need to be more tangible, whether it's political parties or putting it in writing."

In the end, despite all his suspicion of leaders and certainty, Lewis loves and honors his family tradition. The N.D.P. regularly approaches him about running for office (as it does Klein), and he thinks seriously about doing so (she does not). During the recent election campaign in Canada, Klein advocated strategic voting—voting for either the Liberals or the N.D.P., depending on which had a better chance of winning in a particular district, to promote the greater goal of unseating the Tories. "I don't believe enough in the N.D.P. to really care," she says. Avi tried to talk her out of it, while her father-in-law was appalled. "I don't have one minute's use for strategic voting," Stephen Lewis says. "I just believe in the most intransigent of ways that you vote for your convictions." But Klein doesn't have much use for political parties. When she is asked about this, she explains that she has seen liberation movements betrayed by the politicians they fought to get elected, but her impatience appears to be rooted in something more than that: she seems to dislike parties and, indeed, governments, in a visceral way, almost the way that Milton Friedman does. In principle, she is a Keynesian, but she distrusts centralization, institutions, platforms, theories—anything except extremely small, local, ad-hoc, spontaneous initiatives. Basically, she really, really doesn't like being told what to do.

It is clear, in "The Shock Doctrine," just how deeply she disdains the political. She tends to conflate very different right-wing groups—neoconservatives, crony capitalists, libertarians. (In the end, "The Shock Doctrine" is not so much anti-Friedman as anti-corporate.) And in hunting down instances in which ideology has been used as a cover for enriching cronies and corporations, she slides into the position that politics is always and everywhere about enrichment. Her great strength—following the money; never taking ideology at face value but always questioning who benefits from it; helping to pull the left back to the economic analysis that it forgot during the era of "the personal is political"—is also a weakness. Her materialism is such that she sometimes seems scarcely to believe that politics exists at all. At one point, for instance, she argues that the Israeli élite lost interest in peace in large part because Israeli companies were doing a booming business in security technology, which benefits from war. She argues that the Chinese Communist Party cracked down on protesters in Tiananmen Square not in order to protect its power but in order to protect Deng Xiaoping's economic-liberalization program (of which breach of orthodoxy, in fact, many in the Party were quite suspicious—a suspicion only reinforced by the pro-Western protests).

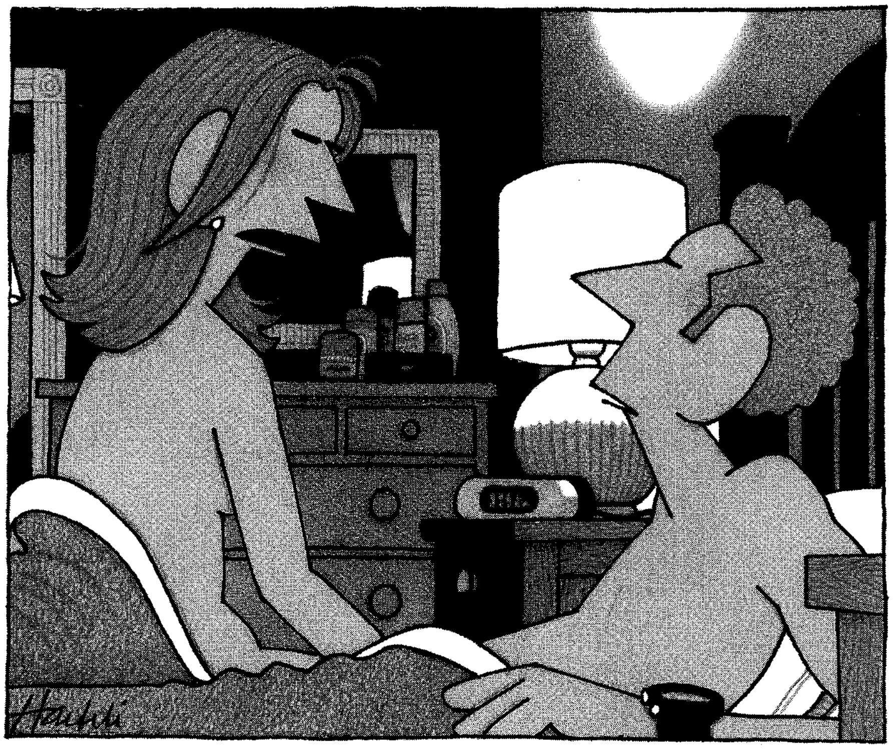
"I'm not a utopian thinker," Klein says. "I don't imagine my ideal society. I don't really like to read those books, either. I'm just much more comfortable talking about things that are." The only time she has ever felt a whiff of utopia was in Buenos Aires, in 2002, when the political system had virtually disintegrated—during the time that she and Lewis were filming "The Take." "That moment in Argentina was an incredible time because a vacuum opened up," she says. "They had thrown out four Presidents in two weeks, and they had no idea what to do. Every institution was in crisis. The politicians were hiding in their homes. When they came out, housewives attacked them with brooms. And, walking around Buenos Aires at night, there were meetings on every other street corner. Every plaza where there was a streetlight, people were meeting under it and talking about what to do about the external debt, I swear to God. Groups of one hundred or five hundred people. And organizing buying groceries together because they could get cheaper prices, setting up barters because the currency was worthless. It was the most inspiring thing I've ever seen."

Klein believes that change comes about only when social movements become so large and disruptive that politicians can no longer ignore them. This is another of her ongoing arguments with her in-laws: whether social movements can really change things. Stephen Lewis is as susceptible to their allure as the next new leftist—he drove down to Little Rock in 1957, when Orval Faubus called out the militia, to witness the civil-rights movement firsthand—but in the end he remains a politician. "Naomi's and Avi's profound skepticism is not a skepticism I share, even though they have far more evidence than I do," he says. "There was a period when people like Avi and Naomi actually thought that the social movements could sort of take over. But you may have a green movement which has influence on carbon tax, you may have a campaign for nuclear disarmament which lowers the temperature over the arms race, but you never have an over-all gestalt which can do everything from day care to foreign aid and see it as part of an over-all pattern to change the world. That has to come through politics."

Both Klein and Lewis are skeptical about Barack Obama. "I've been at rallies and seen him speak, and I feel that feeling that one feels," Lewis says. "It *is* thrilling. And it's churlish not to allow yourself to be thrilled. We crave inspiration, and it's a bleak life to always be dissecting things. But the main feeling that Obama creates in me is fear, because I see people fooling themselves. If you actually look at his policies, what they reflect is the triumph of the right-wing political paradigm since Reagan, and I think he could set things back dramatically, because for young people who are getting engaged in politics for the first time, for them to be disillusioned is very, very damaging." Because Klein doesn't expect much from any politician, she doesn't spend time wishing Obama were more progressive. "I don't want to appear too cynical, but when I first saw the 'Yes We Can' rock video that Will.I.Am made, my first response was 'Wow, finally a politician is making ads that are as good as Nike's,' " she says. "The 'Yes We Can' slogan means whatever you want it to mean. It's very 'Just Do It.' When you hear it, you catch yourself thinking, Yeah! We're gonna end torture and shut down Guantánamo and get out of Iraq! And then you think, Wait a minute, is he really saying that? He's not really saying that, is he? He's saying we're going to send more troops to Afghanistan. He's telling regular people what they want to hear, and then in the back rooms he's making deals and signing on to the status quo. But if people don't like where Obama is they should move the center." To this end, Klein has been taking every opportunity to call for the nationalization of the oil companies. "It's the job of the left to move the center," she says. "Get out there and say some crazy stuff! And then, suddenly, it'll seem more reasonable for politicians to take riskier positions."

For someone who places so much weight on social movements, though, Klein can get dyspeptic when she finds herself in the middle of one. Activists are so earnest, so dedicated, so—like her parents. "Marches depress me," she says. "Going for a walk and chanting—I get nothing out of it." When she began participating in the anti-globalization movement, she understood that protests outside trade summits were the main way that the movement was making itself heard, but they still seemed a little comical to her. "Is this really what we want?" she wrote in a column in the summer of 2000. "A movement of meeting stalkers, following the trade bureaucrats as if they were the Grateful Dead?" The World Social Forum in Brazil ought to have been a place where she felt at home, but there was too much chanting, and José Bové went around with bodyguards to protect him from the paparazzi, and the activists kept accusing one another of racism and classism, and the cultural interludes were hard to take. "A line of dancers appeared on stage, heads bowed in shame, feet shuffling," she wrote, describing one. "[Then] the people on stage began to run, brandishing the tools of their empowerment: hammers, saws, bricks, axes, books, pens, computer keyboards, raised fists. In the final scene, a pregnant woman planted seeds—seeds, we were told, of another world."

The only kind of protest she likes is the Yippie kind, theatrical enough to be entertaining and self-mocking enough to dilute the earnestness to a level that she



"If we're going to be friends with benefits, I want health and dental."

can tolerate. At the protests in Quebec City during the Summit of the Americas in 2001, for example—when the officials surrounded themselves with a tall protective fence, a group of activists built a medieval-style wood catapult and lobbed Teddy bears over the top. "Quebec City was just madness," she says. "It was one of those times when nobody knows what's going to happen, and there are these breakthrough moments, these liberated moments, these moments of euphoria. It was mostly young people, and they were getting gassed, but they were still enjoying themselves tremendously, playing cat and mouse with the police. What I loved about it was that the whole city joined in—people working in cafés on the main streets, and neighbors got buckets of water to wash out people's eyes. It was like an alternative reality."

After the death of Milton Friedman, in 2006, the University of Chicago decided to set up an institute in his honor. The institute was opposed by many professors, who formed a group to protest it. Klein offered to debate someone from the institute's board, but nobody would do it, so she agreed to go to Chicago and talk about her own objections to the project.

The evening was sponsored in part by the Platypus Affiliated Society—a student-teacher reading group that focusses on the Frankfurt School and the Second International period of Marxism—and a few of Platypus's members, tall, thin, pale young men, had set up a table out front. Platypus was founded on the idea that the left didn't have a proper sense of its own history, especially the bad bits, and that a study of that history would help it emerge from the troubled state in which it found itself. ("Protest has devolved into an insular subculture of self-hatred, frustration, and anxiety derived from a pathological attitude towards social integration," a typically morose editorial in the *Platypus Review* declares.) Given its emphasis on self-criticism, Platypus was not a natural constituency for Klein's work, but because she was coming to the campus the group read "The Shock Doctrine," and also Hayek and Friedman. "The conservatives engage the questions of freedom and utopia directly," Ian Morrison, the editor of Platypus's newsletter, said. "We were very struck that Klein seemed to back away from utopianism, because we feel that the left has liquidated itself in part because it's conceded talk about freedom to someone like Bush." Platypus's interrogation of the past has led it in a variety of directions. Several of its members also belonged to the new Students for a Democratic Society, a revival of the new-left group from the sixties. In August, Platypus participated in a historical reënactment, in Grant Park, of the 1968 Democratic Convention, minus the police. "As a group of young, largely inexperienced activists it was the only organizing framework we could find which emphasized *active* participation," read a writeup of the event in the *Platypus Review*. "Other forms seemed linguistically and ideologically flaccid. . . . We didn't want to view our history—*our radical history*—as if from a riverbank, we wanted to jump in and splash around in it. . . . We debated, for instance, the ethics of nominating a live pig for the presidency: what should we feed it, and where would it stay?"

The Platypus men filed into the front row of Assembly Hall, and Klein stood at the lectern. There was a good crowd, not just people from the campus. Three anarchists had driven up from St. Louis specially to see her. "What we have been living since Reagan is a policy of liberating the forces of greed," she declared. "I don't think the project has actually been the development of the world and the elimination of poverty. I think this has been a class war waged by the rich against the poor, I think that they won, and I think the poor are fighting back."

Klein never tempers her arguments in search of converts from the center; she rallies her base. She's not interested in making the left part of the mainstream; she wants to convince the left that it doesn't need the mainstream. "Part of what makes us less strong than we should be," she says, "those of us who don't believe that profit should govern every aspect of our lives, is that part of us accepts the narrative that neoliberal ideas have triumphed around the world because they were popular and our ideas failed." For this reason, it is important to her, in "The Shock Doctrine," that there be virtually no exceptions—that is, instances where radical market reforms are enacted with the consent of a people. (In passing, she concedes Reagan and Sarkozy.) But some of her examples are less plausible than others. She argues that the Falklands War—a ten-week venture whose main impact on Britain was an outpouring of jingoistic glee—was "a large enough political crisis," creating sufficient "disorder" to enable Margaret Thatcher

"You can see by its smile that this halibut was humanely killed."

to "impose" her economic agenda. (It is true that, without the glee, Thatcher might not have won the next election, but ill-gotten popularity and traumatized regression are not the same thing.) Klein dismisses as a "propaganda exercise" a referendum held by Boris Yeltsin in which a majority of voters supported his reforms, on the odd ground that it was nonbinding. She maintains that the war in Chechnya was waged not in order to crush secessionism but in order to protect Yeltsin's economic policy. Thus, she concludes, it "contributed significantly to the Chicago School crusade death toll."

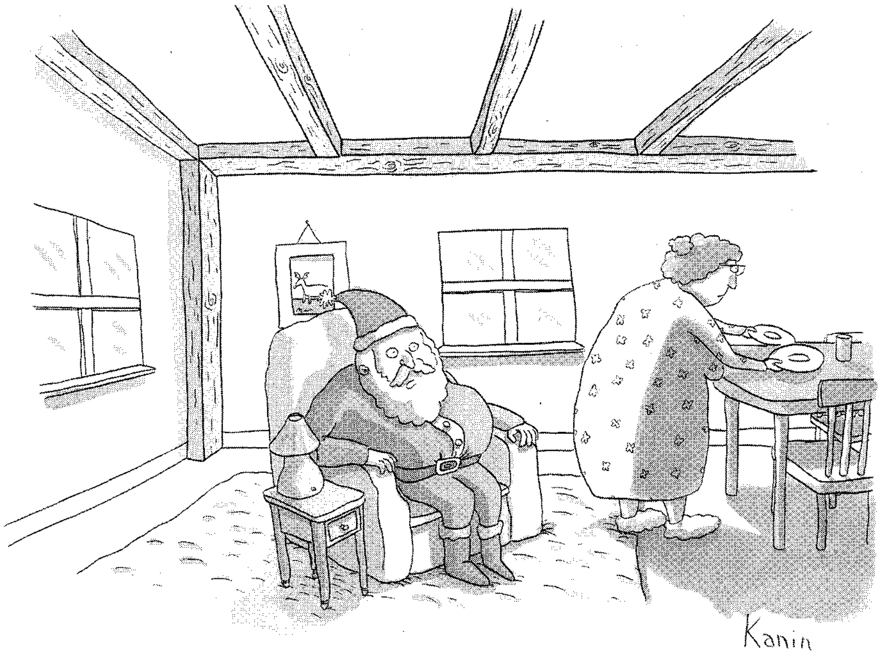
"Naomi is a pattern recognizer," Lewis says. "Some people feel that she's bent examples to fit the thesis. But her great strength is helping people recognize patterns in the world, because that's the fundamental first step toward changing things."

Throughout "The Shock Doctrine," Klein is at pains to portray Friedman as a quasi-Satanic figure. The first chapter of the book describes the horrifying psychiatric experiments performed in the nineteen-fifties by one Donald Ewen Cameron, in which subjects were tortured by electroshock. She characterizes this work as a metaphor for the economic shocks performed in Friedman's name; the next chapter, about Friedman, is titled "The Other Doctor Shock." The promotional film that Klein made with Alfonso Cuarón is even cruder—a pastiche of disturbing footage of patients receiving electroshock treatment, images of prisoners being tortured, and the sound of a child wailing in an echoey room. "Unable to advance their agenda democratically, Friedman and his disciples were drawn to the power of shock," Klein says in the voice-over, in the calmly terrorizing tone of a campaign attack ad. "Friedman understood that, just as prisoners are softened up for interrogation by the shock of their capture, massive disasters could serve to soften us up for his radical free-market crusade."

Why does Klein place such emphasis on Friedman? Perhaps because she wants to draw a parallel between capitalism and Communism, to make their two histories look as similar as possible, and for that she needs not the messy, pragmatic, ad-hoc capitalism of corporations but the purist, utopian capitalism of the Chicago School. Violent autocrats of the free-market persuasion, though there have been many, have not soiled Friedman's name in the way that Stalin soiled Marx; somehow, the misdeeds of a Pinochet or a Suharto or a Yeltsin are attributed to these men as individuals—to their lust for power, their greed, their drinking. But Klein holds capitalism guilty of all their sins. Friedman's followers must no longer get away with shaking their heads when their advisees start killing people, she believes. They should feel themselves dupes, fellow-travellers, accessories: they should acknowledge their willed ignorance and complicity, as her grandparents and the Communists of their generation were forced to do.

"My grandparents were pretty hardcore Marxists, and in the thirties and forties they believed fervently in the dream of egalitarianism that the Soviet Union represented," Klein told the audience in Chicago. "They had their illusions shattered by the reality of gulags, of extreme repression, hypocrisy, Stalin's pact with Hitler. . . . The left has been held accountable for the crimes committed in the name of its extreme ideologies, and I believe that's been a very healthy process. . . . When you start issuing policy prescriptions, when you start advising heads of state, you no longer have the luxury of only being judged on how you *think* your ideas will affect the world. You begin having to contend with how they actually affect the world, even when that reality contradicts all of your utopian theories."

The day after the Chicago event, Klein taped an appearance on "The Colbert Report," then went directly to the airport for a flight to France. She came back and went on a speaking tour to Texas, Colorado, California, and Wisconsin, did two panels in New York, and then later flew to Chicago for its humanities festival and to Miami for the book fair. She spent a week in Poland. Everywhere she went, she stuck to her theme. "The crash on Wall Street should be for Friedmanism what the fall of the Berlin Wall was for authoritarian Communism, an indictment of an ideology," she says. It was clear to her that the past month had proved what she'd been saying for years. Now, if she could only speak often enough, to enough people, and explain things persuasively enough, maybe the left would stop wringing its hands and the right would start apologizing. It seemed unlikely, but she would try all the same. ♦



"Oh shoot, we still need to get Hanukkah gifts for the Rosenbaums."

NEWYORKER.COM

A conversation with Larissa MacFarquhar.

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

THE RAP

Keeping hip-hop safe from crime.

BY IAN FRAZIER

Derrick Parker is the hip-hop cop. Although he no longer serves on the police force—he retired from the New York Police Department in 2002, as a twenty-year veteran with the rank of detective, first grade—that is still how people think of him. For years, Detective Parker was the department's hip-hop expert, and, starting in 1999, he headed a special intelligence unit that focussed on rap and hip-hop crime. Now he has his own security firm in midtown. When a crime takes place in the rap and hip-hop world (a common occurrence) and no leads or witnesses can be found (ditto), Derrick Parker is still the person to call. In the past, he has consulted with police not just from New York but from Miami, Orlando, Atlanta, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles. Rap music exists in a strange symbiosis with crime, and those close to the music are usually unwilling to talk to the police. This combination makes Derrick's skills unique; he probably knows more about crimes in the rap and hip-hop community than anybody but the perpetrators themselves.

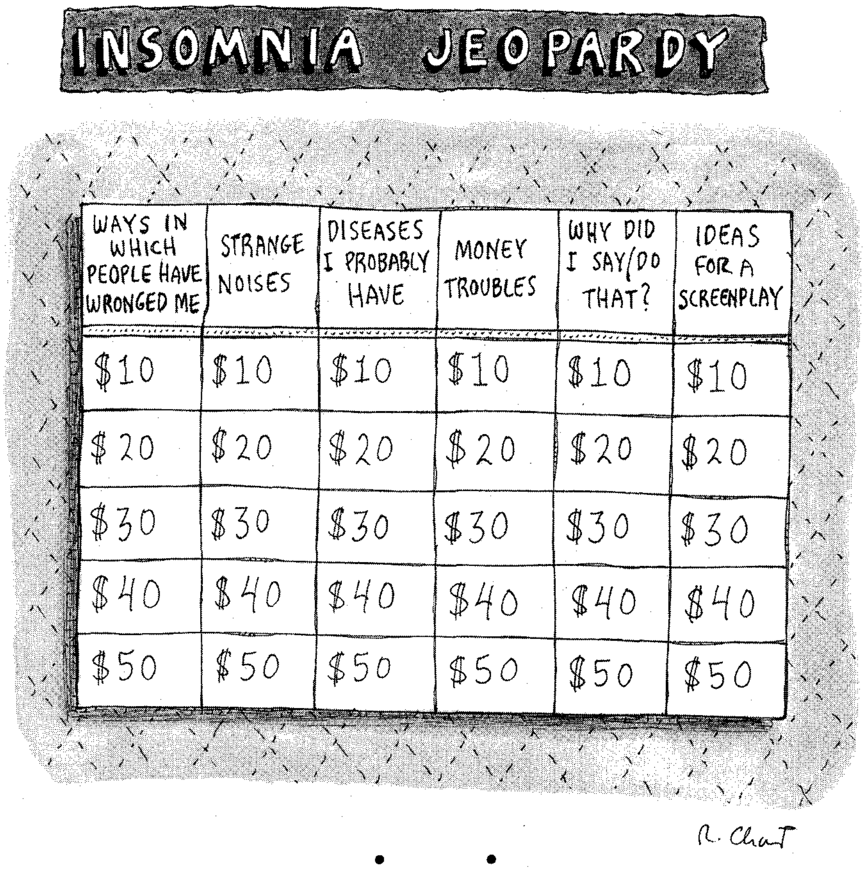
His company, Styles Security and Executive Protection, on West Twenty-seventh Street, provides security for concerts, night clubs, retail stores, and construction sites, along with executive protection and private investigation. The work allows Derrick to expand a circle of acquaintance already staggeringly large. He seems to know everybody. In the rap world, this familiarity extends from stars like Jay-Z and Foxy Brown to the dancers in the videos to Steve, the guy on the sidewalk who hands out rap-show flyers from a shopping bag. Derrick can tell you who shot Tupac Shakur and Jam Master Jay, and he has a fair idea of who killed Biggie Smalls. Just because a murder is unsolved doesn't mean nobody knows who did it. Information seeks out Derrick through the air, arrives with the R. & B. ringtone of his cell phone. "The street will tell you everything you need to know, if you wait patiently," he says. "The street knows everything."

Derrick turned forty-seven last May. He still has a kid's round, unlined face and a kid's openmouthed smile—the kind that goes up and down as much as it goes across. The expression conveys total delight; for all the mayhem and wickedness he has dealt with in his professional life, he is a remarkably lighthearted guy. Derrick stands six feet three and weighs about three hundred pounds. With his size and presence, you tend to see only angles of him, not all of him at one time. He is black, but now and then people mistake him for Indian or Latino, and he can get away with Italian, too. Strangers sometimes come up to him and start right in speaking Spanish, of which he knows only a few words.

He favors well-tailored suits in black or charcoal gray, purple shirts, and lavender ties. When called to testify in court, he dresses in a gray pin-striped suit, a white shirt with collar and cuffs of a creamier shade, and a tie striped white, light blue, and gray. A single-carat diamond-stud earring highlights his left earlobe. On occasion, he wears on his right hip or under his left arm a .40-calibre Glock automatic, a pistol he likes for its stopping power. "If you are shot with a forty-calibre you will definitely be wounded, possibly seriously enough to lead to your demise," he says. But in twenty years with the N.Y.P.D. and five in private security he has never fired his gun except at the range.

His hands are large and thick, and he knows certain things like the back of them. To underscore this point, he will hold up one hand and tap its back significantly with the other, meanwhile tucking his chin into his collar and looking at you through his eyebrows. The gesture is that of an experienced interrogator.

Derrick Parker (center) at Bada Bing, in the Bronx. "I wanted to let law enforcement know about rap's inner workings," he says. Photograph by Brian Finke.



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One particular thing he knows like the back of his hand is the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn. He was born there, in St. John's Episcopal Hospital (now Interfaith Medical Center), and both sets of his grandparents lived there. Later, his father, Lionel, a cop with the Sanitation Department, moved the family to St. Albans, in Queens. From visiting his grandparents back in Bed-Stuy, growing up in the black middle class of St. Albans, and attending mostly white Bayside High, to which he was bused, Derrick absorbed a cross-section of New York. With this background, he can talk to anybody. White cops saw him as black, but fellow black cops used to tease him, "You ain' black, you're from Bayside!"

Derrick's mother, born Dolores Bryant, came from black show-business aristocracy. Her father, Willie Bryant, was the leader of a well-known swing band in the thirties and forties. He was also an uptown celebrity, then and into the fifties, as the master of ceremonies at the Apollo Theatre. The city named him "Mayor of Harlem" (an honorary position) in 1952. Later, he moved to California, where he worked as a disk jockey and an actor for several years. Willie Bryant was light-skinned and could play non-black roles. Dolores says that Derrick reminds her of her father—"Especially when he quirks his eyebrow at you after he tells a joke. My daddy used to do his eyebrow just that way." For complicated reasons involving his grandparents' divorce, his grandmother's remarriage to a man whom Derrick knew as his grandfather but who was really his step-grandfather, and Willie Bryant's early death, in California, in 1964, Derrick never saw him face to face. But as a boy he did watch him in reruns of "The Untouchables." Dolores remembers that in one episode her father played a crony of the gangster Frank Nitti and in another he was a detective helping Eliot Ness.

On an October night a couple of years ago, two crimes took place on the same block of West Twenty-first Street in Manhattan. At about midnight, a gold-and-diamond chain reportedly worth fifty thousand dollars was snatched from the neck of Sebastian Telfair, a professional basketball player then with the Boston Celtics. The theft occurred outside Justin's, a bar and soul-food restaurant frequented by rap stars. Telfair did not call the police or ask anybody else to; but by some accounts he was seen talking on his cell phone afterward. Then, within the half hour, somebody shot Fabolous, the rap star, in the thigh as he stood in a parking lot just up the street. On the way to Bellevue Hospital, the car in which Fabolous was riding was pulled over by the police, who found two handguns in it.

Logic suggested that the shooting and the theft were connected. Two weeks after the crimes, the *News* sought out Derrick Parker (reporters, too, sometimes turn to Derrick to help them understand what's going on), and he explained that Fabolous grew up in Brooklyn's Brevoort projects, home to a number of dangerous thugs who belong to a gang called the Commission, or the Street Family. Some of these guys are part of his crew, according to Derrick, and Fabolous even gave the Street Family a shout-out in one of his performances. In the past, this gang has robbed the rappers Busta Rhymes, Ol' Dirty Bastard, and Foxy Brown, Derrick told the *News*. Of the Telfair robbery, he added, "If the Commission members didn't do it, they know who did do it." Telfair, who comes from a project in Coney Island, has had his own run-ins with the law; Derrick speculated that after the Fabolous shooting there might be retaliation against Telfair. In any event, neither the theft nor the shooting was (or is) likely to be solved by the police. Neither victim gave the cops much useful information, and because gun charges against Fabolous were eventually dismissed, even those couldn't be used against him. (Fabolous's attorney says that the Street Family is a group of artists, and that his client "is not involved in any illegal activity.")

With no forthcoming witnesses, solid suspects, or arrests, Derrick's explanation seemed the closest to a resolution that these murky events were likely to have. As an average uninformed observer, I found myself grateful even for that slim shaft of clarity. The *News* article also mentioned that Derrick had a book out. It's called "Notorious C.O.P.: The Inside Story of the Tupac, Biggie, and Jam Master Jay Investigations from the NYPD's First 'Hip-Hop Cop,'" by Derrick Parker, with Matt Diehl. Mainly, it concerns Derrick's N.Y.P.D. career, especially his years working in rap intelligence, with long sections about the famous rap murders in the title. I enjoyed the book a lot; Derrick says that it has received praise from street thugs as well as from veterans of the N.Y.P.D.

The first time Derrick and I met, at his office, he held forth for six hours straight. Detective work is about narratives, and Derrick has hundreds of them. On top of that, he's naturally outgoing. Over the next couple of months, I hung out with him now and then—or, rather, I followed along while he did what he does. Being with him was almost always relaxing, like travelling with a citywide all-access pass.

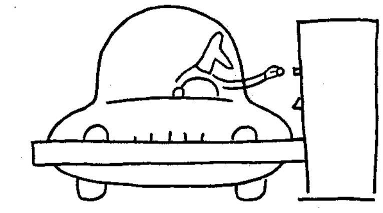
One night in May, Derrick was manning the door at Spotlight Live, a night club on Broadway at Forty-ninth Street. Not much was going on when I arrived, at about eleven. Derrick stood by the velvet rope with other bouncers, some of them his employees, some the club's. One or two were even bigger and wider than he; a guy called House looked the part, all the way up to the rooflike black ski cap on top. Under a black suit coat, Derrick wore a heavy brown-and-black turtleneck against the chilly night air. Rain was falling straight down and a flashing advertisement that covered many stories of a nearby building was changing the rain from silver to red to blue. Derrick stayed dry under the marquee. I had an umbrella.

Derrick and the promoters he works with divide their night-club events into categories. They are: Gay, Bridge & Tunnel, Latino, Italian, Asian (usually Chinese or Korean), Jewish, and Urban. Urban means black. Tonight was to be an Urban party, and the promoters, for security reasons, wanted an upscale crowd without too many gangster overtones. In dress-code terms, that ruled out baggy jeans, white T-shirts, gold chains, hooded sweatshirts, flat-brim fitted baseball caps ("fitteds"), do-rags, gang colors, and Timberland boots. The guidelines had some flexibility, naturally, and on a person-by-person basis Derrick was to be the arbiter. Practically speaking, that put him in charge of turning actual gangsters away. Before I arrived, a kid he didn't let in told Derrick that he was going to get his gun and come back and pop him. Derrick laughed this off.

By midnight, the crowds were lining up. Kids—everyone there was a kid, it seemed to me, though some might have been in their thirties—came in groups of two or five or a dozen. Some of the young women were so beautiful that a force field around them dematerialized the raindrops before they hit. On this raw night, a few of these women were wearing, basically, handkerchiefs; unshivering, they stepped neatly on their pinpoint stilettos around the subway gratings without looking down. Nobody on city streets is as sweet and winsome as a young person trying to pass muster at a night-club door. The wrongly dressed ones whom Derrick had questions about carried their appeals to bystanders, including me: "Yo, man, see—these boots *ain't* Timbalands, man, they jus' *look* like Timbalands!" And when Derrick approved of a particular ensemble, its wearer nodded with satisfaction and pride. To a woman who had on a zebra-stripe dress, House, the bouncer, said, "I *agree* with that!" The woman beamed.

An odd-looking older white guy walked up carrying a stick of firewood. It was good-sized, prism-shaped, with bark on one side. When told he could not take that into the club, he replied that he expected to have the firewood returned to him when he left. A tour bus stopped on Broadway and a full load of British tourists poured out. They thronged around Derrick, pleading to be let in free, their faces upturned like baby birds'. Two of them sheltered under my umbrella. They were from the city of Rochdale, in Lancashire, they said, and visiting New York on an all-expenses-paid tour sponsored by their company. Just for variety, Derrick let in all the Britishers. Streams of people, mostly women, kept showing up for a private birthday party on the club's third floor for somebody named Raheem. They also got in free.

All the while, Derrick provided a commentary for me, sort of out of the side of his mouth: "That dude there is DJ Clue, from Power 105 FM. He's doin' the music tonight. He's the one whose car got shot up in front of the Hot 97 radio station a few years ago. Those guys behind him look pretty thugged-out, it's true, but I gotta let 'em all in, 'cause they're with him. . . . That big guy is Al Harrington, the pro basketball player, with the Golden State Warriors. . . . That's Donnell Rawlings, the former 105 FM d.j. . . . O'Neal McKnight, the rhythm-and-blues guy; next week, he's doin' a bar mitzvah for a friend of mine. . . . Glenn Toby, a good friend of mine from Queens back in the day, you gotta meet this guy. Glenn is the hottest sports agent around right now. He just moved Asante Samuel, of the New England Patriots, to the Philadelphia Eagles for I don't know how much money. . . . That guy with the fade haircut is Kenny, a friend of Foxy Brown's brother, Gavin; [to Kenny] Yo, man, I don't want you callin' your crew in Brownsville, sayin', like, 'Yo, it's hot over here at Spotlight, you better come over here!' I don't want to see any of your Brownsville crew around here tonight! . . . That huge guy, wearing the Cadillac medallion around his neck, he's called Escalade; he runs a charity basketball tournament uptown. . . . The dudes with those slinky women are the founders of FUBU clothing. . . . That sharp-looking guy with his hands in his pockets is Chris Gotti, of Murder Inc. Records, a big-time producer. He was cleared of federal money-laundering charges, got a not-guilty verdict a couple of years ago. We've done a lot of security work for Chris and his brother, Irv. Their real last name is Lorenzo. They're both really good guys.



"Sometimes in the clubs I see people from twenty, twenty-five years in my past," he went on, during a lull. "Guys I arrested back in the day are surprised I still remember their real names, their priors, what they did time for, the names of their baby mamas—all the data you store up in your head when you're a detective. A couple of years ago, at this club called Avalon, this dude tried to slip by with his hat down over his face, and I looked and I recognized him. It was a guy who'd been an enforcer for some Brooklyn drug dealers called the Ortiz brothers, Dominican guys. While he was working for them, this guy had a guy handcuffed in a bathroom and he was beatin' him tryin' to find out what he'd done with some money he owed the Ortiz brothers, and this guy gets carried away and he kills him. So now he doesn't know what to do, so he cuts the guy up into parts, and later the victim's bones were found in trash bags beside the highway. The guy eventually got arrested for something else, and he turned state's evidence for the Feds, and helped convict a lot of other criminals, so the Feds gave him a reduced sentence, and he was out in eleven years.

"Anyway, as he was goin' by me at Avalon, I said to him, 'So, do you still like to use cutting tools?' and he said, 'Aww, Parker, *man*, don' be bringin' that old stuff up, all that's in my past, I did eleven years, I got my life back now.' Later, I told the promoter who this guy was and the promoter said, 'You mean you let a convicted murderer and dismemberer into my club?' I said, 'What can I do, man? He was dressed properly. According to the U.S. government, he's paid his dues.' "

By three in the morning, the night was winding down. A few people still came but no line accumulated at the door. The rain had stopped. Sometime after three, a small, mild-looking man asked to be let in with no cover charge. He said his name was Raheem. "Raheem, the dude with the birthday party?" Derrick asked; it was the very same. "Man, what're you doin' comin' so late to your own party?" Derrick remonstrated. "There's dozens and dozens of fine-lookin' women up there waitin' for you!" Raheem hurried in; rarely had I seen a happier man. The guy who had been compelled to check his piece of firewood came out and claimed it from beside a phone booth, where it was still sitting on the curb. The British tourists also began to emerge, in twos and threes, a few of them knee-walking drunk and being steered by their companions. The number of police cars parked out front on Broadway, which had never been fewer than two, increased to five. Standing beside them was Lieutenant Walter Mayerback, the N.Y.P.D. officer with special oversight of all night clubs in the Midtown North Precinct. Under a street light, he looked on with his arms crossed. Derrick took ten minutes and went over and talked cordially with him.

Derrick got into the security business in this way:

After high school, he went to St. John's University, then dropped out and joined the Police Academy. He graduated and became a cop in 1982. First, he worked street patrol in Times Square, and then the department assigned him to undercover narcotics in the Bronx, where he grew a bushy beard and spent his days buying drugs from street dealers and assisting in arrests. This was at the height of the crack-cocaine boom, when a single team might make thirty arrests in a day. For his success working undercover, Derrick received a promotion to detective, third grade, in 1986. Out of nearly thirty-eight thousand New York City cops, only five thousand are detectives, and to become one at the age of twenty-five is rare.

From the Bronx, Derrick went to the detective squad of the Seventy-fifth Precinct, in the East New York section of Brooklyn, and then to the Eighty-first Precinct, in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Both were experiencing an unprecedented surge in murders. In the Eighty-first, he regularly led the precinct in the number of murder cases closed. When his boss there, Lieutenant Commander Joseph Pollini, was given the job of running the N.Y.P.D.'s Cold Case Squad, in 1996, he took Derrick with him. Some of the city's best detectives work at Cold Case. They have more freedom and use more personal initiative as they track down long-uncaught murderers, sometimes travelling out of state or even out of the country.

Throughout his years in the department, Derrick also moonlighted at other occupations. Police regulations allow New York City cops to work up to twenty hours a week at outside jobs, provided the jobs meet certain criteria. Derrick was the assistant promotional director and then the promotional director for a magazine called *Chocolate Singles*, a publication aimed at young single black people. In that capacity, he arranged parties, dances, group vacations, and musical events, putting in ten hours or so a week for about six years. Sometimes he also sang backup for musical acts in night clubs, and in 1988 he even cut his own record, "Single Man," with Jump Street Records. He had always loved rap music, from back when it almost didn't have a name and he used to listen to local rappers who wired their amps into the bases of street lights in places like O'Connell Playground, in Queens. As rap grew in popularity and crimes became more common in the hip-hop world, he tried to alert his superiors in the department to the problem.

They didn't have much interest until 1997, with the murder of Biggie Smalls. After the rapper and Bed-Stuy habitué was shot, in Los Angeles, Derrick told his superiors that Biggie's funeral, in Brooklyn, would be huge. By then, Derrick was known in the department as the authority on questions regarding rap. Partly because of his counsel, the department assigned thousands of officers to escort the funeral procession, he says. Though the crowds showed up as predicted, the event went off without major violence. After that, the N.Y.P.D. decided that rap crime should have its own unit within Gang Intel. In 1999, Derrick was moved from Cold Case to head the new rap-intel squad.

Two high-profile New York City rap-related crimes followed not long afterward. In December of 1999, there was the Club New York shooting, when Sean (Puffy) (at the time) Combs got into an altercation in a midtown club that left three patrons shot, one seriously. Combs, with his bodyguard, his driver, and his then girlfriend, Jennifer Lopez, was picked up in his S.U.V. on Eighth Avenue after fleeing the scene. A high-ranking police boss called Derrick at home on Long Island at two in the morning and told him to go to the Midtown North Precinct right away. Dozens of reporters, photographers, and miscellaneous people were at the precinct house by then.

Derrick recalls the lawyers for the parties under arrest applauding when he walked in; they were glad to see someone who knew what he was doing. He took over from the duty chief and straightened things out, allowed each person to see his or her attorney, and unlocked Jennifer Lopez's arm from a pipe where somebody had handcuffed her. When all the principals in the case were taken to Midtown South, the precinct of the shooting, he says he rode in the car with Jennifer Lopez.

Among the witnesses who had been at Club New York was a man named Glen Beck, who was doing security for the promoter. Beck had been standing at his station just outside the club's entrance when he heard shots. He looked inside, and seconds later he saw Combs and others hurtling down the club's stairs, tripping on a broken step, and sliding around the curved wall at the bottom, like when a roller coaster goes around a turn on its side. Then they ran out the door. Along with other witnesses, Beck gave a statement to the police. As it happened, he and Matthew Bogdanos, the A.D.A. prosecuting the case, had both been in the Marine Corps. Bogdanos introduced Glen Beck to Derrick, recommending each man highly. Glen and Derrick hit it off right away.

The next rap crime to make news was the Lil' Kim shoot-out. In February, 2001, Lil' Kim's entourage and sympathizers of her rival, Foxy Brown, fired more than twenty shots at each other on the streets of a commercial and residential neighborhood downtown. The fact that the shoot-out took place where it did—a woman with a baby stroller appears on the security tape just before the gunfire starts—really upset the police. Derrick had recently switched to celebrity bodyguarding as his off-duty occupation, and when the shooting occurred he was in Las Vegas escorting the Rock, the actor and World Wrestling Federation star. An urgent call from the chief of detectives brought him back to New York, where he met with Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik, who, according to Derrick, yelled, "Derrick, I want those fuckers! And I want those fuckers *now!*"

One result of this incident was that the chief of detectives ordered Derrick to compile a dossier that included every person in the rap-music business who might be of interest to the police. Derrick says he thought that the idea was unsound, because people in the hip-hop world might somehow obtain the information in the dossier and use it against each other. Also, such a plan seemed close to racial profiling. He was told to make the dossier anyway, and he did, and it became known in the department as the Binder. Newspapers later found out about the Binder, quoted people who were outraged to hear about it, and identified Derrick as the one who had compiled it.

In May, 2001, police detectives in Atlantic City asked Derrick to come down and help them gather intelligence during a rap event there. He agreed, and took his brother along, because he thought he might enjoy the trip. Two detectives who were working the Lil' Kim shooting heard about the trip and asked if they could meet up with Derrick in Atlantic City. They hoped they might find some leads there. He said that would be O.K. But in Atlantic City, when the detectives walked up to him and asked where they might find a guy they wanted to talk to, Derrick just shrugged and smiled. The guy in question was standing right next to him.

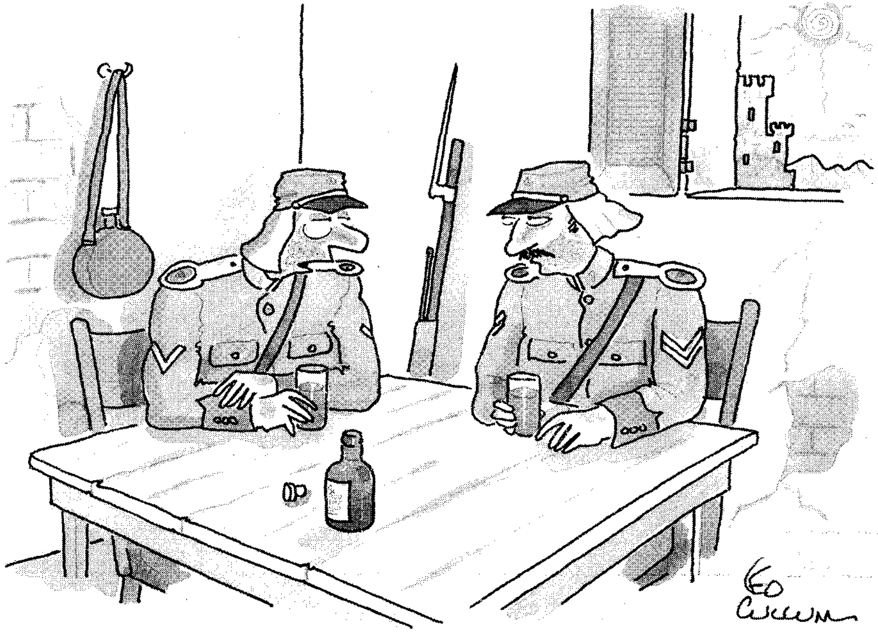
Afterward, the detectives complained to the department that Derrick wasn't helping them. They also said that Derrick's brother had represented himself as a New York City cop while in Atlantic City. Because of this charge, and an earlier one alleging that Derrick had leaked information to the defense in the Sean Combs trial, Derrick became the subject of an investigation by the department's Internal Affairs Bureau. After examining the facts, the I.A.B. concluded that the charge of leaking information was groundless, and that Derrick's brother had not represented himself as a policeman in Atlantic City. The I.A.B. did, however, give Derrick a ruling of "warned and admonished" for bringing his brother along while he was on the job. Derrick recalls that his punishment was the loss of one or two vacation days.

This series of events persuaded Derrick that he should retire. His high profile and his friendships with rappers had brought him enmity in the department, and he feared that another I.A.B. investigation might cost him his pension. A number of precinct chiefs asked him to join their homicide squads. Joseph Pollini, his former boss at Cold Case, offered him his old job back. Derrick thanked them but said no. By now he was making a hundred thousand a year as a detective, first grade. His pension would be half that plus health insurance and adjustments for cost of living. He had no big expenses—no wife or children to support—and he could think of lots of other things he'd like to do. He left the force in January, 2002.

In the meantime, a jury had acquitted Sean Combs of gun possession and bribing a witness in connection with the Club New York shooting. "It made no sense for Bogdanos to claim that Puffy had a gun," Derrick said. "Puffy has people to do that for him." Glen Beck's description of Combs coming headlong down the stairs, tripping, and turning sideways along the wall argued against Combs possessing a gun at the time, because it would have fallen out in the tumble. Beck testified for the defense, and as a result his friendship with Bogdanos grew strained.

Derrick and Glen Beck, however, had become close friends. Each had skills that complemented the other's. Beck, the former marine, is a jujitsu fifth-degree black belt, and a direct, confrontational type who doesn't hesitate to fight, while Derrick has a more laid-back and diplomatic style. By temperament, the two make up the classic hard-cop, soft-cop duo. Eventually, they decided to pool their experience and go into business together. The year after Derrick retired, he joined Styles Security, which Beck had recently founded. Some of Derrick's former colleagues told him that he had gone over to the "dark side." But he found that he liked his new career better, all in all, than being with the police.

On the walls of Derrick's office hang a cloth dartboard for Velcro darts, several plastic security I.D.s on lanyards, a poster-size blowup of a *Village Voice* front page featuring him, and his



"I'm trying to forget a 401k."

Certificate of Retirement from the N.Y.P.D. On one side of his desk is a squat floor safe and a paper shredder, and in a corner stands a fingerprinting table with ink pad, fingerprint blanks, and alcohol swabs. About fifty guys work for him; during the busier months, at the end of the year, he might employ eighty or a hundred. Each employee is fingerprinted, and then vetted and licensed by the state. Each also has to take a total of twenty-four hours of state-administered training and an annual eight-hour refresher course.

TERZA RIMA

In this great form, as Dante proved in Hell,
There is no dreadful thing that can't be said
In passing. Here, for instance, one could tell

How our jeep skidded sideways toward the dead
Enemy soldier with the staring eyes,
Bumping a little as it struck his head,

And then flew on, as if toward Paradise.

—*Richard Wilbur*

Sometimes the top document on the piles on Derrick's desk is a letter on impressive stationery from a law firm informing him that he is being sued. Bouncers can't legally do much to you besides intimidate you. If they use physical force and injury or damage results, they can be arrested or (as more often happens) sued. Derrick's company gets sued all the time. He has never lost a trial and he doesn't mind going to court. At the moment, four plaintiffs are suing him. Two of the suits involve deaths: first, he says, by the family of a young man who died of stab wounds across the street from Spotlight, in January, because the family claims he was stabbed inside the club when Derrick and his guys were on duty; and, second, by the family of a man who allegedly assaulted one of Derrick's off-duty bouncers with a pipe and the bouncer punched him and the man died.

No one who has worked for Derrick's company has been seriously injured or killed in his employ. However, a longtime employee named Israel Ramirez, called Izzy, died of a gunshot wound while working for somebody else. Izzy was a cheerful guy, twenty-nine years old, with three kids. Both Derrick and Glen liked him and considered him a friend; Glen had known Izzy since he was a teen-ager. In February, 2006, Izzy was working as a bodyguard for the previously robbed Busta Rhymes at the filming of a video at a warehouse in Brooklyn. An argument started between people at the event when a group of guys with the rapper Tony Yayo got kicked out. As the dispute continued on the street, somebody shot Izzy in the chest. Of the hundreds in attendance at the video session, nobody would say who killed him. Busta Rhymes, who is presumed to have seen the shooting, expressed condolences to Izzy's family but did not tell the police much of anything.

Other bodyguards and bouncers, Derrick and Glen included, reasoned that any one of them could have been Izzy. Some security firms were so disgusted by Busta Rhymes's unhelpfulness to the police that they said they would no longer work for him. Derrick took a more lenient view. "If Busta goes to the cops, he's a snitch," Derrick says. "His popularity and his record sales go way down. It would be impossible for him—career suicide. The detectives on the case should realize that fact and start coming up with other witnesses. They won't make any progress if they keep focussing on Busta." Derrick adds that his company has not boycotted Busta Rhymes.

When I mentioned this opinion of Derrick's to a detective who had worked with him and is still on the force, the detective said, "I think that's bullshit, honestly. So Busta's record sales do go down ten per cent. So what? If Busta saw who killed his bodyguard, he should come forward, because it's right. Forget about the record sales. There's a principle involved here. Busta should come forward because it's right.

"Derrick is a good man, and somehow he gets along with and understands and even likes these people he works for," the detective said. "Well, Derrick does what he does. You dance with the devil and hope you don't get burned."

Going to meet Derrick at the Eighty-first Precinct station house in Bedford-Stuyvesant one morning, I took a roundabout way through the neighborhood. I'd walked a lot in Brooklyn, but not much in or near Bedford-Stuyvesant before. The day was hot, and by eight o'clock I had sweated through my shirt. A school crossing guard looked at me and said, "Mm-hmm, sweatin' already!" At the corner of Myrtle and Vanderbilt Avenues, a few blocks past the Walt Whitman Houses, I came upon a memorial mural on the brick wall of a building. It showed the face of a bright-eyed, sincere-looking, mustachioed fellow superimposed on a blue sky above a seascape with palm trees. I recognized the name—Benjamin C. O'Garro—from Derrick's book. That would no doubt be the same Benjamin O'Garro (or O'Gara) also known, Derrick says, as Killer Ben. The memorial did not mention this street name, or Derrick's theory that he had been killed for stealing a chain from a Biggie Smalls associate at a music-awards show. As I walked, I noticed other street-corner murals. Most depicted painfully young and fresh-faced men, often in an elongated, El Greco-like portrait style. Many of the murals are fading in the weather and need to be restored.

At the corner of Myrtle and Marcy, I turned left and wandered into the paths through the Marcy Houses, a public housing project of apartment buildings spread over six full blocks. None of the windows in the buildings were broken, community gardens flourished among the lawns, police cars proceeded slowly along the paths, and there was almost no trash. I asked a maintenance person sweeping something into a long-handled dustpan, "Who would you say is the most famous person ever to come from the Marcy Houses?" She answered, "Jay-Z," with no pause, as if the name were her own. Then, looking up and smiling, she said, "Jay-Z grew up here, and there's other famous rappers from Marcy, too—Papoose, Memphis Bleek . . ."

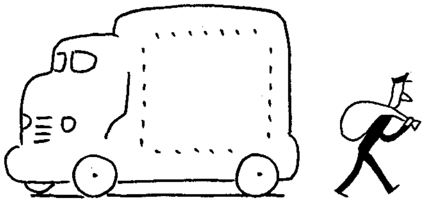
That day, Derrick and I spent doing what he referred to as a "ride-around." "I'll call you back—I'm on a ride-around with this writer," I heard him tell somebody on his cell phone. Our only purpose was looking at out-of-the-way places of interest in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. On some of the streets we went down, the kids hanging out smiled and pointed at us. Derrick laughed. "They see a black guy and a white guy in an unscript car and they think they've spotted the po-po," he said. His driving might have been another clue. He drove like a cop, with a taken-for-granted authority, talking to me or on his cell phone all the while. If another car wanted to go ahead, he graciously let it, then swooped where he wanted to go.

"I asked you to meet me in the Eighty-first because I learned to be a detective mostly here," Derrick said. "When I was assigned to the Eighty-first, I already knew the neighborhood, because of my grandparents. I worked in the Eighty-first for eight years and I solved a lot of murders here. You gotta remember this was back in the crack era, when New York had many more murders than it has now. In the precinct where I was before this one, we had six murders in my first week. One year in that precinct, the Seventy-fifth, there were a hundred and twenty-eight murders—an average of more than two murders a week. The Eighty-first is smaller and not as bad as the Seventy-fifth, but, still, here in the Eighty-first we had fifty-one murders one year. I saw people who'd been killed every way you can be killed—shot, cut up, stabbed, face blown off by a shotgun, poisoned, shaken-baby syndrome, strangled, stuffed in a closet, smothered, decapitated, drowned. I don't know why seeing all that didn't affect me more. I mentally removed myself from it, I guess. I always loved to catch the guys that did it, though.

"With so many murders, you had a very high rate that were going unsolved. Some of the detectives here were just walking through the motions—they couldn't catch Charlie the Tuna on a tuna-fish can. I was lucky here in the Eight-one because I had an older detective that helped and taught me, Lloyd Henry. He was my father's age, and I was twenty-five, and Lloyd told me, 'I'm as old as your father, and I'll beat you like your father, too!' Lloyd Henry rode me like Seabiscuit, but he made a good detective out of me."

Derrick then called Lloyd Henry, who still lives in the neighborhood, and asked if we could stop by. Lloyd Henry was just going out for a jog. He said he would wait for us, and came out in his running gear. We talked on the front steps of his brownstone. Lloyd Henry is a slim, light-eyed black man who ran a 47.4-second quarter mile in college and almost looks as if he could do it again today. He retired from the N.Y.P.D. in 1995, after thirty-eight years. "Derrick had all the street skills and all the people skills you need to be a detective when he started out," Lloyd Henry said. "I didn't teach him any of those. I *did* teach him something about paperwork. That's mostly what being a detective is—paperwork, typing, filling out forms. People used to ask me what I did for a living and I'd say, 'I'm a clerk-typist.' That was really my job, more than anything else. On TV shows like 'Law & Order,' when a detective brings a witness to the station house, he tells him, 'The sergeant will take your statement now.' That is completely untrue to life. No sergeant will take that statement—*you*, the detective, take the statement yourself, and then you type it up and get the signatures on it and photocopy it and file it and all the rest. Typing, neatness, spacing, making good reports—most of the young detectives and a few of the older ones were terrible at that."

"Remember Ernie Bostick, that couldn't type at all?" Derrick put in. "Ernie would triple-space his reports, so he had to run over onto extra pages that he'd staple to the original, and he made typos practically every other word. One time, Ernie was trying to type 'homicide' and he messed it up so bad it came out 'yomice.' When we read the report we couldn't believe that typo. So that became the word we used. We'd say, 'Hey, how many yo-mice did we have in the precinct this month?' or 'Hey, Lloyd, did you get any leads on that yo-mice on Gates Avenue?' "



Lloyd's wife, Geraldine, appeared from inside to give Derrick a hug. She joined us as Derrick and Lloyd talked about the robbery at the Shoe King store where a cop was shot five times and an accomplice of the robbers, shot in the leg, bled to death while the paramedics were taking care of the cop, and about the detective who used to fall asleep on the job while he drove, and about the suspect who agreed to take a lie-detector test and then showed up at the precinct house in the stolen car used in the crime. "Lloyd and Geraldine are like my family," Derrick said as we walked back to his car. Later, I noticed that many of the people he talked about, and almost everybody he introduced me to, he described in this way.

Every sight that passed by his windshield in Bed-Stuy seemed to be connected to him and to have a long caption. On Lewis Avenue, I glimpsed another memorial mural, this one to somebody named Larry Low-Top. "Oh, yeah, I knew Larry Low-Top," Derrick said. "I forget what his real last name was. He lived over past Decatur Avenue. I questioned him a few times. I don't think I ever arrested him, though."

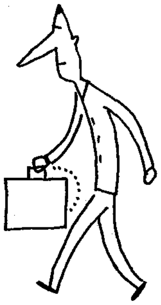
"What was he like?"

"Larry? Well, he was a black male, about five-nine, box-cut haircut like Wesley Snipes in 'New Jack City,' always wore low-top sneakers, rocked a pink suit sometimes. He was shot to death outside his own birthday party at the Toy Factory, at Fifth Avenue and Twenty-fourth, in Manhattan."

Certain storied housing projects went by—the Tompkins Houses, the Sumner Houses, the Brevoort Houses. "We took a lot of bad guys out of here," Derrick said, as the Brevoort's many buildings came up on our right. He started talking about names from the past, recalling Kendu, and Da Kommander, and D-Nice, and Nubbs, and King Tut, and Big Born, and Sequan, and D-Wiz, and JuJu, and Franklin Frias, and Kool Aid and his even more dangerous brother Glaze, and Bey Allah. Our wanderings continued through East New York, past the Seventy-fifth Precinct House ("Home of the Brave") and along Jamaica Avenue into Queens. I have trouble grasping sometimes how huge New York City is. Queens alone is endless. We saw the house Derrick grew up in and the park where he heard his first hip-hop music. On a residential street in one of the borough's far reaches, four guys in the middle of the street were leaning into the open window of a waiting car. As Derrick eased his car past, he recognized a couple of them. They were guys he'd seen a few times at a club where he works in Manhattan. He waved his arm out the window and said, "Yo, what up?" They registered considerable surprise and asked what Derrick was doing way out here. "Man, I'm everywhere," Derrick said.

Near the corner of Merrick and Linden Boulevards, in Queens, we passed the African Methodist Episcopal church where the family of Jam Master Jay held his funeral. Derrick said how bad he felt about Jay's murder, and how his one regret about retiring was that he would have liked to lead the investigation. He criticized the overaggressiveness of the Queens police—the "Queens Marines"—who handled the case, and especially the way they dealt with the witnesses.

Derrick thinks that Jay had become involved with drugs to supplement a declining income from his music, that he got into a dispute over payment, and that he knew his life was in danger. On his last day, he was at the Queens music studio where he often worked. He showed no signs of distress, but he had a loaded pistol on the couch beside him when he died. The receptionist at the studio, Lydia High, probably saw the killers. They went past her desk and into the room where Jay was playing video games and shot him in the head. Based on what Derrick has heard, he believes that the killers were a man named Ronald (Tinard) Washington, who is in prison for robbery, and a father-son team. (Federal prosecutors agree with Derrick's opinion about Washington, though his lawyer points out that he has never been charged in the killing.)



Neither Lydia High nor other witnesses who were in the studio have identified the person who pulled the trigger. Not long after the murder, Lydia High received a telephone call that she took to be a threat on her life. She was afraid to go to the funeral without a bodyguard, but she couldn't afford one, so she asked Derrick. He agreed and escorted her, armed with a pistol. After the graveside ceremony, as he was driving her and her girlfriend home, they were pulled over by Queens detectives. He says that one of the detectives yelled at Lydia through the car window and yanked on the door handle and tried to get her out of the car. The tactlessness of this further upset her and reduced the chances of getting her to coöperate. Eventually, she did coöperate, reluctantly. Later, she decided she would be better off if she left the state, and Derrick helped her with five hundred dollars from his own pocket in moving costs. Tinard Washington is serving a seventeen-year-sentence, but, as far as Derrick knows, the father and son are still out walking around.

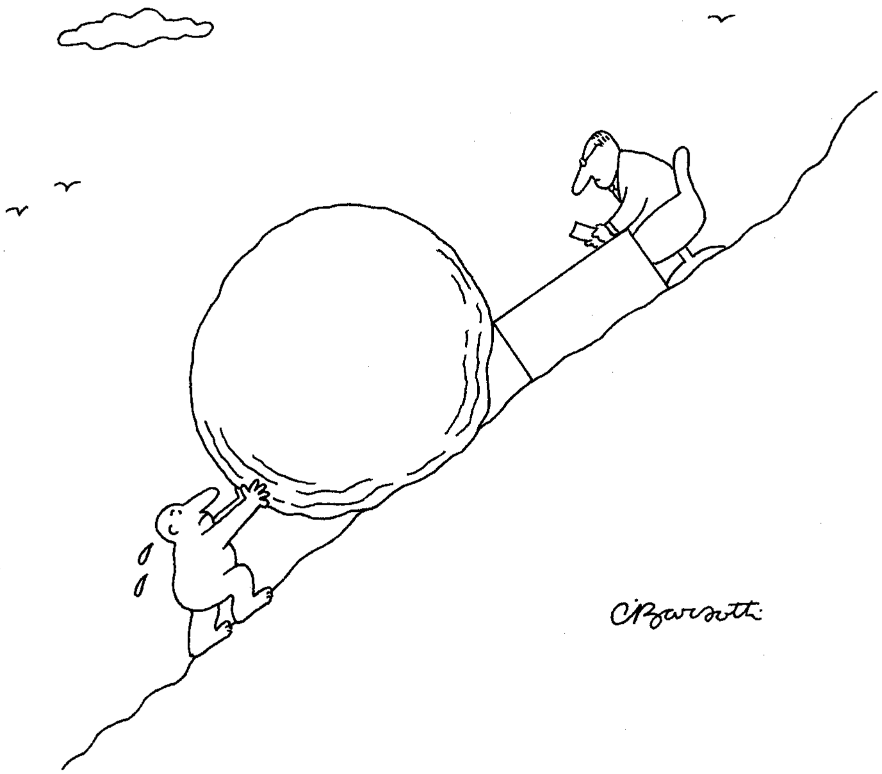
I asked Derrick whether, given the difficulty of finding solid information and witnesses willing to testify, he had ever actually caught a criminal in a rap-related crime and had later seen that criminal go to prison.

His answer was long and amounted to not many. It touched on the ignorance of the police department as regards hip-hop and rap, his own desire when he was a cop to educate his fellow-cops on the subject, the resistance of some of them to being educated, and the persistence of an us-versus-them attitude among the police. "Some cops didn't trust me because of people I hung out with, and some of the people I hung out with didn't trust me because I was a cop. Actually, though, I wasn't *against* either side. What I was doing at rap intel wasn't against the hip-hop community at all. There are plenty of people in rap who don't like the thug element and the violence that got involved in the scene. After crack pumped so much money into poor neighborhoods, and little thug dealers thought they were something big, they saw the money the rappers were making and they wanted some of that. And after the thug element got in, it was hard to remove. Take someone like Fabolous, who grew up with thugs and gang guys. When Fabolous becomes a star, is he going to say to them, 'Yo, get lost, I'm famous now'? No, because they're his guys. Even if you weren't afraid that they'd kill you, you might do the same.

"Obviously, over the long run the violence has been bad for rap's image. Last week, I heard on the radio that a tour had to be cancelled because, with two hard-core rappers on the bill, the venues were scared to book it and the promoters couldn't get liability insurance. Seventy per cent of rap's audience is white suburban teen-agers. When the violence gets too bad, that audience is going to drift away. It's starting to do that already. So, no—my goal was never just to arrest and convict rappers. I wanted to let law enforcement know about rap's inner workings, and show the majority, nonviolent element in rap that there were law-enforcement people on their side. My basic goal was to protect rap music from itself."

Derrick had a rough summer. In June, an irate patron of the World Famous Bada Bing, a South Bronx strip club for which Derrick provides security, tried to run him over on the sidewalk outside the club. Derrick and Edgar Ramos, one of the managers at the time, dodged the vehicle, which then rammed Derrick's brand-new black Nissan Murano, parked nearby. The police later caught the guy, he said. The Murano spent a long while in the shop. In July, Derrick's father, with whom he lived, died suddenly of a heart attack. The death and the accompanying family difficulties shook Derrick. When I called him, he sounded stunned and miserable. The change made me notice how, up till then, I'd never known him to be in any mood other than happy and easygoing.

In August, a man was murdered on the same stretch of sidewalk outside Bada Bing where Derrick had dodged being run down. Another man, shot in the chest and leg, survived. Police arrested three suspects in the killing. Derrick wasn't at Bada Bing that night, but one of the shots grazed Terence, a very wide guy who works for him, in the back and side. Afterward, Derrick visited Terence in the emergency room at 5 A.M. And that same night, after Derrick finished tending the door at Spotlight for a big blowout birthday party for Lil' Kim, a young woman was murdered on Spotlight's roof. The body wasn't found for a couple of days. Police questioned Derrick and all the guys he had working at Spotlight for that event. A "bar back"—a club employee who brings supplies to the



bar—later confessed to the killing, according to police. (He has since pleaded not guilty.) Inspectors descended on the club and found violations, and the club closed indefinitely.

On the night Barack Obama made his acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention, I went to the Bronx to see Derrick at Bada Bing. The club is in a low gray brick building with black security gates, and it occupies most of an irregularly shaped block below a span of the Bruckner Expressway. Railroad tracks in a sunken road cut run alongside, and the wider neighborhood offers auto junk yards of crashed vehicles with their air bags deployed, vast no-name warehouses, and chain-link fences grafted to thickets of ailanthus trees. The trucks on the Bruckner, the surface streets' unmuffled cars and motorcycles, and the airplanes overhead all speed past as if they were atoms dissipating rapidly from the city into the pink-tinted sky.

Derrick wasn't there when I arrived. I found Edgar Ramos, and he led me into the d.j. booth, where he was filling in until the real d.j. arrived. To get to it, we had to pass through a room where about thirty young women in almost no clothes were waiting to go on. Most were tattooed. I saw a striking tattoo: two staring eyes, with long eyelashes. What made the eyes striking was that they were at the very base of the back. The club was large, dim, and fogged with artificial smoke for atmosphere. There were enough dancing platforms so that a number of dancers could perform simultaneously. I watched Barack Obama's speech, closed-captioned above the painfully percussive music, on ceiling TV monitors through a writhing forest of dancers on poles.

When Derrick showed up, at about midnight, we stood around outside. He showed me the place on the sidewalk where the guys had been shot; one of them had failed to escape because his low-riding jeans fell down and tripped him. On this slow Thursday, not so many people were out, but almost everybody who came by greeted Derrick, and he introduced me to them all. I met more guys he knew from Queens, and other bouncers, and dancers coming to work the later shifts, and Terence, the bouncer who was grazed, and a guy named Julio who had just taken the police exam and who wanted Derrick to write him a recommendation, and a guy who said he had just talked to a cop who was carrying around an Intel gang chart written in Derrick's handwriting.

Derrick leaned back against the wire cables that braced a telephone pole and he talked about what he would like: a job with the N.Y.P.D. where he had complete freedom and no responsibilities other than catching bad guys, or maybe a consulting job going around to police departments and teaching them how to close out homicides. He said his company wasn't making money yet, really, but he expected it to start doing that soon. Companies don't usually earn money until their fifth or sixth year, he said, and this was only the fifth year for his. The night got late enough so that the rats came out in the parking lot of the McDonald's across the street. Derrick said, "Hey! A rat!," cheerfully pointing out the rodent as it came hopping from beneath a parked car into the restaurant's orangish light.

Occasionally when I'm with Derrick, I think again about his grandfather Willie Bryant. Some of the shows Willie Bryant m.c.'d at the Apollo are on video at the Library for the Performing Arts, at Lincoln Center, and I've seen one or two of them. (Derrick, as it happens, has never seen them himself.) The program is a musical-variety revue that was taped at the famous theatre. Willie Bryant introduces the acts and provides entertainment and banter in between. At that age, he looks surprisingly like Derrick, except that Willie Bryant's hair is straightened and flat in the then popular painted-on style.

Willie Bryant comes out, talks to the audience, and exchanges fast jokes with the comedian Nipsey Russell. He lounges against the proscenium arch, compliments Dinah Washington before she sings, dances a few steps of a Cab Calloway-style shuffle, plays some air piano when moved by the fast boogie-woogie of Amos Milburn, and eases back into the wings to give Duke Ellington some room. Leonard Feather, the jazz critic, once wrote that Willie Bryant m.c.'d an Apollo show "in his usual flawless manner." He "followed the unusual policy of introducing every man in the band by name, and did it in such a manner that it bored nobody."

That's sort of what Derrick does, too. There's this cool nighttime world, and he's part of it, and everybody in it is, if not necessarily good, at least worth knowing about. "I don't care who they are," Derrick says. "I don't talk down to anybody." ♦

WAITING

BY AMOS OZ

The old village of Tel Ilan was surrounded by orchards and groves. Vineyards grew on the slopes of its eastern hills, and its houses' red-tiled roofs suffocated under the thick foliage of ancient almond trees. Many of the townspeople continued the tradition of farming with the aid of migrant workers, who lived in ramshackle huts. Some leased out their land, turning to cottage industry and running bed-and-breakfasts, art galleries, and trendy boutiques, while others found work elsewhere. In the town square were two gourmet restaurants as well as a local-wine merchant and a pet store specializing in tropical fish. One of the villagers had opened a workshop manufacturing pseudo-antique furniture. On weekends, Tel Ilan was flooded with tourists and bargain hunters. But on Fridays at noon everything shut down for the day, and the residents took siestas behind closed shutters.

Benny Avni, the head of the District Council of Tel Ilan, was a lanky man with stooped shoulders and a fondness for rumpled clothes and oversized sweaters, which gave him an ursine look. He walked pitched forward with a stubborn gait, as if he were fighting a strong headwind. His face was pleasant, his brow high, his mouth gentle, and his brown eyes warmly inquisitive, as if to say, *Yes, I like you, and yes, I want to know more about you.* He possessed a gift for refusing without the refusee realizing that he had just been refused.

At 1 P.M. on a Friday in February, Benny Avni sat alone in his office answering letters from concerned citizens. The municipal offices closed early on Fridays, but Benny Avni made a point of staying late at the end of the week, personally responding to every letter. After he finished, he intended to go home, have lunch, take a shower, and nap until dusk. On Friday evenings, Benny Avni and his wife, Nava, sang in an amateur choir group at Dalia and Avraham Levine's house, at the end of Beth Hashoeva Lane.

As he was answering the last few letters, he heard a hesitant knock at the door. His sparsely furnished office, a temporary facility he used while the municipal building underwent renovations, contained little more than a desk, two chairs, and a filing cabinet.

Benny Avni said, "Come in," and looked up from his papers.

ALESSANDRA SANGUINETTI, "UNTITLED" FROM "ON THE SIXTH DAY" (1996-2004)/YOSSI MILO GALLERY

Into the room walked a young Arab named Adel, a former student who was now the resident gardener at Rachel Franco's estate, at the edge of the village, near the graveyard's stand of cypress trees.

Benny Avni smiled. "Sit down."

But, rather than sit, Adel, a small, thin man with glasses, hovered sheepishly near Benny Avni's desk, lowered his head respectfully, and apologized, saying, "Am I disturbing you? I know the office is closed."

"Never mind. Sit."

Adel hesitated, then perched on the edge of the chair, his erect posture insuring that he did not touch the back of the furniture. "It's like this: your wife saw me walking in your direction and told me to drop this off. Actually, it's a letter."

Benny Avni reached out and took the folded note from Adel. "Where exactly did you see her?"

"Near the Memorial Park."

"Which way was she walking?"

"She wasn't. She was sitting on a bench."

Adel rose to his feet, paused, then asked if there was anything else he could do.

Benny Avni smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "That will be all."

Adel said, "Thank you very much," and left.

Benny Avni unfolded the note, which was written on a page torn from Nava's kitchen notebook. In her circular handwriting, he saw the following four words: "Don't worry about me."

He was baffled by these words. He and Nava always ate lunch together: at noon, she would leave the primary school where she taught and would wait for him to arrive home for lunch. After seventeen years of marriage, Nava and Benny still loved each other, but their daily interactions were characterized by a measure of mutual politeness mixed with suppressed impatience. She didn't like his bureaucratic dabblings; nor did she like the way his work followed him home or the even-handed congeniality that he dispensed abundantly and indiscriminately. He, for his part, was growing tired of her enthusiastic devotion to sculpting artistic figurines, which she fired in a kiln in their back yard. He found the smell of burned clay that lingered in her clothes to be sickening.

Benny Avni dialled his own number and let it ring eight or nine times before agreeing with himself that Nava was not there. He thought it strange that she had left before he got home, and even stranger that she had sent the note via Adel without bothering to say where she had gone or when she would be back. The note puzzled him, and he found the messenger dubious. But he did not worry: he and Nava always left each other notes under the vase in the living room.

Benny Avni finished writing his last two letters—one to Ada Dvash, concerning the renovation of the post office, and the other to the council's treasurer, concerning the pension plan of an employee. He placed the outgoing mail on a shelf, checked the windows and shutters, put on his suède jacket, locked both deadbolts, and left. He planned to walk through the Memorial Park, past the bench where Nava might still be sitting, so that they could go home together. However, after a few steps, he returned to his office, because he thought he might have forgotten to turn off his computer, or maybe he had left the light on in the bathroom? But the computer was off and the bathroom dark, so Benny Avni locked both deadbolts again and went to look for his wife.

Nava wasn't on the bench in the Memorial Park. She wasn't anywhere. But Adel, the thin young student, was there, sitting alone, an open book face down on his lap. He was staring at the street while a sparrow sang in the trees above. Benny Avni placed his hand on Adel's shoulder and asked gently, as if afraid of hurting him, "Wasn't Nava here?" Adel replied that she was here before, but not anymore.

"I can see that she is gone," Benny Avni said, "but I thought that perhaps you knew where she went?"

Adel said, "Forgive me. I'm really very sorry."

Benny Avni responded, "That's O.K. It's not your fault."

He headed home along Synagogue Street and the Tribes of Israel Street, walking at an angle, his body tilted slightly forward, as if struggling with an invisible force. Everyone he met along the way greeted him with a smile; Benny Avni was a popular head of council. He smiled warmly in return, asking, "How are you?" or "What's new?," occasionally

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reporting that the issue of the crack in the sidewalk was currently being resolved. Very soon, everyone would be at home eating lunch and then napping, and the streets of the village would be empty.

His front door wasn't locked, and in the kitchen the radio was playing softly. Someone was discussing the evolution of the commuter railway system and the obvious advantage of trains over cars. In vain, Benny Avni looked in the regular place—under the vase in the living room—for a note from Nava. On the kitchen table his lunch awaited him, a plate covered with an inverted plate to keep warm: chicken, mashed potatoes, cooked carrots, and green beans. A knife and fork sat on either side of the plate, and, under the fork, a folded cloth napkin. Benny Avni put his lunch in the microwave for two minutes, because, despite the makeshift lid, the food was nearly cold. While waiting, he opened the refrigerator and took out a bottle of beer, which he poured into a mug. As soon as his lunch was ready, he ate hungrily but without paying attention to what he was eating, listening to the radio, which was now broadcasting light music punctuated by endless advertisements. During one ad, he thought he heard Nava's footsteps on the front path? He looked through the kitchen window, but the yard was empty and all he could see, among the thistles and scrap iron, was a dilapidated cart with two rusty wheels.

After lunch, he put his dishes in the sink and turned off the radio. A deep silence prevailed. Only the ticking of the wall clock could be heard. His twin daughters, Yuval and Inbal, were on a field trip to Upper Galilee. He walked down the hallway to take a shower and saw that the door to the girls' room was closed. He peeked inside the darkened room. A light smell of soap and ironing hovered in the air. He shut the door quietly and continued toward the bathroom. He took off his shirt and pants, but then, in his underwear, suddenly changed his mind and approached the phone. He wasn't worried, but nonetheless he kept asking himself, Where could Nava have gone, and why hadn't she been waiting for him at lunchtime as always?

He called Gila Steiner and asked if Nava was there.

Gila said, "No. Why? Did she say she was coming over?"

Benny Avni said, "That's the thing. She didn't say where she was going."

Gila said, "The general store closes at two. Maybe she stopped by to get something."

Benny Avni said, "Thanks, Gila. It's O.K. I'm sure she'll be back soon. I'm not worried."

Nevertheless, he looked up the phone number for the general store. It rang for a long time. Finally, the nasal tenor of Old Man Lieberson responded in a cantorial singsong, "Yes, please? Here speaks Shlomo Lieberson of the store. How might we help?"

Benny Avni asked about Nava. Old Man Lieberson replied sadly, "No, Comrade Avni, I'm sorry, your fetching wife has not enlisted here today. We have not yet had the pleasure. And I am thinking it is unlikely we will, for at exactly fourteen hundred hours we are closing operations and retiring to our domicile to prepare ourselves for receiving the Queen Sabbath."

Benny Avni walked into the bathroom, finished undressing, waited for the hot water to manifest, and took a long shower. He thought he heard the door squeaking and so, when drying himself, called out, "Nava? Is that you?" But there was no response. He put on clean underwear and a pair of khakis and left the bathroom, searched the kitchen, went to the living room and checked the easy chairs facing the TV, then walked into the bedroom and out onto the enclosed terrace that Nava used as her "creative studio." She would shut herself in on the terrace for long hours, sculpting figurines in clay, fantasy creatures as well as tiny busts of boxers with square jaws and sometimes broken noses. The kiln was in a shed in their back yard. So Benny walked to the shed and turned on the light and stood there for a moment, blinking, but all he could see were the disfigured figurines and the cool kiln, surrounded by dark shadows, which also covered the dusty shelves.

Benny Avni asked himself if he should just lie down and stop waiting for Nava. He returned to the kitchen to put his dishes in the dishwasher. He looked inside for any clue as to whether she'd eaten before she left, or perhaps she hadn't had lunch at all? But the dishwasher was almost full, and there was no way to judge which plates might have been used earlier that day and which had been there before.

A pot of cooked chicken sat on the stove. But there was no indication as to whether Nava had eaten and then left some extra chicken for him or whether she hadn't eaten at all. Benny Avni sat by the phone and dialled Batya Rubin. The phone rang ten, then fifteen times. No one answered. Benny said to himself, Don't be silly!, and went to the bedroom for his siesta. At the foot of the bed were Nava's slippers: small, slightly worn at the heels, and colorful, like a pair of toy boats. He lay motionless, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Nava was easily offended, and over the years he had learned that any attempt to appease her verbally only made things worse. So he opted to practice restraint and let the passage of time assuage her anger. She would overcome but not forget. Once, her best friend, Dr. Gila Steiner, had approached him with the idea of exhibiting a show of Nava's figurines in the council's gallery. Benny Avni had emphatically promised to consider it. Ultimately, though, he had decided that it would be too risky: Nava's sculptures were, after all, no more than the work of an amateur housewife, and her exhibit would be better suited to one of the primary school's galleries, in order to avoid rumors of nepotism. Nava had said nothing, but for a few nights she had stood in the bedroom ironing until three or four in the morning. She had ironed everything—even the towels and the throw rugs.

After twenty minutes, Benny Avni suddenly got up, went down to the basement, and turned on the light, igniting a whole swarm of insects. He surveyed boxes and suitcases, fingered the electric drill, tapped on the wine barrel, which echoed with a dim hollowness. Then he turned off the light, went upstairs to the kitchen, hesitated for a moment, put his suède jacket on over his bulky sweater, and left the house without locking the door. He strode forward at a pitched angle, as if fighting a harsh headwind, and went to look for his wife.

On Friday afternoons the village streets were empty. Everyone was resting in preparation for the night's festivities. The day was gray and moist, with low clouds weighing on the rooftops and a thin fog floating below. Slum-

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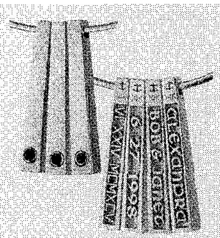

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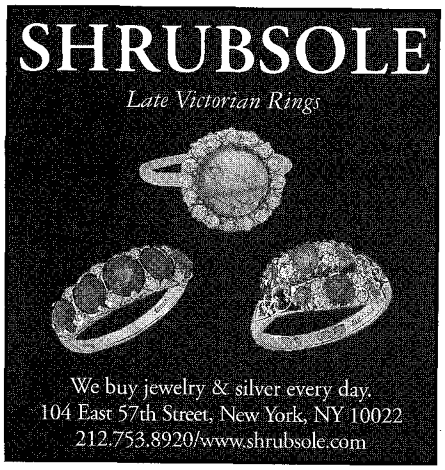
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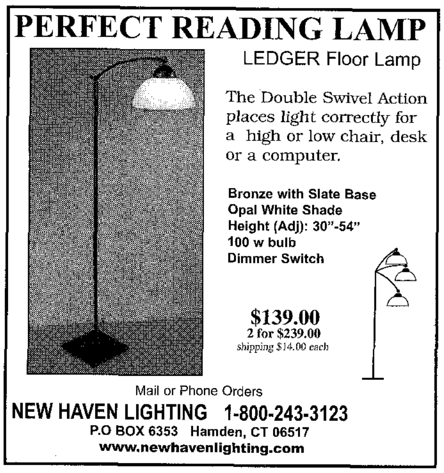
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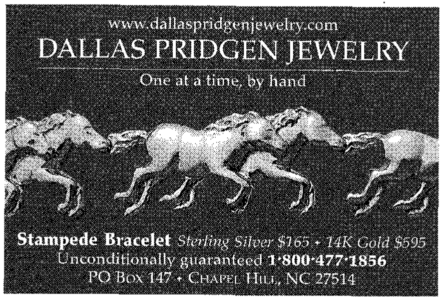
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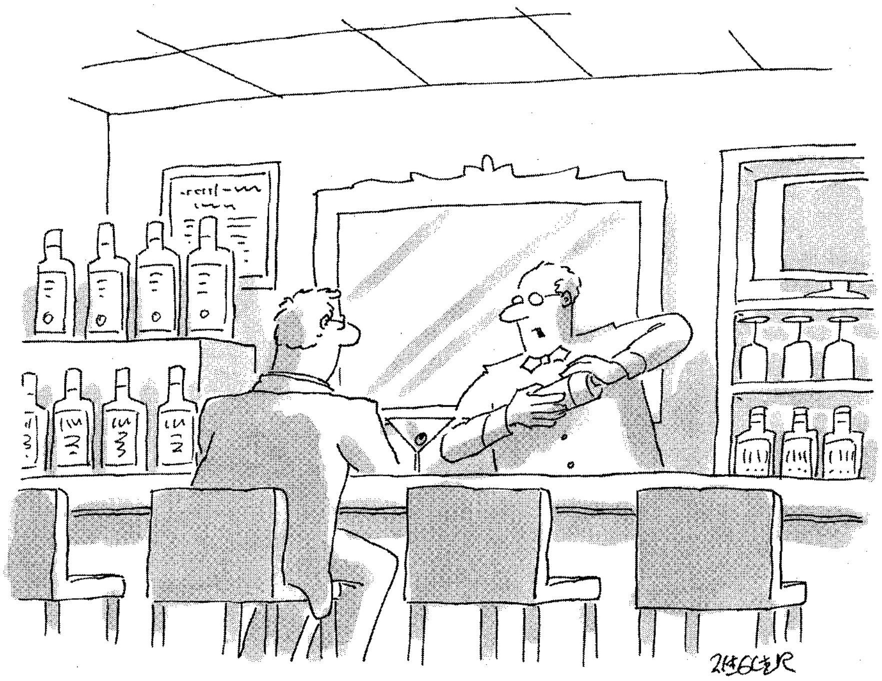

"Heads up, Mr. B. Come February, we make the switch to high-def booze."

• •

ber wrapped each shuttered house. The February midday wind carried a scrap of newspaper, which Benny tracked down and put in the trash. Near the Veterans' Garden, a large mongrel dog began to follow him, growling and baring his teeth. Benny Avni scolded the dog, which became fiercer and looked nearly ready to pounce. Benny Avni grabbed a stone and hurled it into the air. The dog recoiled, tail between his legs; still, he followed Benny Avni from a safe distance. And so the two of them continued, about ten metres apart, turning left onto the Street of the Founders. Here, too, all the shutters were closed for the siesta. Most were painted a faded gray, some with their wooden cross braces crooked or missing.

Over the years, the well-tended front gardens of Tel Ilan had been abandoned to oblivion. Benny Avni saw, here and there, decrepit dovecotes, livestock stables turned into shops, the skeleton of an old truck sunk to its hips in savage growth beside a deserted tin shed or an empty doghouse. Two ancient palms had once grown in his own front garden, but four years ago Nava had insisted that they be cut down, because the swish of their fronds against the bedroom window kept her awake at night and filled her with sorrow.

Jasmine and asparagus grew in some of the yards, while in others there were weeds under the tall palms, gossiping in the wind. Benny Avni paddled along, his arms moving in unison, as he passed the Tribes of Israel Street. In the Memorial Park he stopped for a moment at the bench where, according to Adel, Nava had been sitting when she gave him the note that said "Don't worry about me."

As Benny Avni paused at this bench, the mongrel dog also paused, ten metres away. He was neither growling nor baring his teeth but was now studying Benny with a wise, inquisitive look. Nava had become pregnant when they were unmarried students in Tel Aviv—she at the Teachers Seminary, and he at business school. Immediately, they had agreed to get an abortion, but two hours before the scheduled appointment, for 10 A.M. at the private clinic on Reines Street, Nava had changed her mind and asked to call it off. She had put her head on his chest and cried. He had implored her to be reasonable—after all, there really wasn't any choice, given their circumstances, and the procedure itself was no more complicated than the extraction of wisdom teeth. He'd waited for her in the café across the street and read yesterday's papers, including the sports sections. Less than two hours later, Nava had appeared, looking pale. They'd splurged on a taxi back to their dorm room, where six or seven noisy students were waiting for Benny, assembled for a previously scheduled committee meeting. Nava lay in bed in the corner of their room, hiding under the blankets. But the arguments, the shouting and jokes and cigarette smoke penetrated the blankets, and she was seized with weakness and nausea and she felt her way along the walls to the bathroom, and her head spun and the pain returned as the anesthesia wore off, and in the stall she saw that someone had vomited on the floor and the toilet seat and she couldn't control herself: she vomited, too. She hid there for a long time, weeping, her head in her arms, arms against the wall, until all the noisy guests had gone and Benny found her trembling. Holding her by the shoulders, he guided her gently to bed. Two years later, they married, but Nava had trouble conceiving. They consulted different doctors touting different treatments. After five years, the twin girls were born, Yuval and Inbal. Nava and Benny had never again discussed that particular afternoon in the dorm; it was as if they had silently agreed that there was nothing to say. Nava taught school and sculpted figurines. Eventually, Benny Avni was elected head of the Tel Ilan District Council, where he was widely liked, owing to his attentive ear and modest disposition. Nonetheless, he knew how to overpower, and this he practiced without the overpowered ever noticing that they were being overpowered.

At the corner of Synagogue Street, he stopped for a moment and checked to see if the mongrel was still following him. The dog stood by one of the garden gates, his tail between his legs, his mouth slightly open, looking at Benny with patience and curiosity. Benny said in a low voice, "Come here," and the dog, panting, pricked up his ears and flashed his pink tongue. Clearly, he was interested in Benny but determined to keep his distance. There was no other living soul to be seen in the village—not even a cat or a bird. There was only Benny Avni and the dog and the clouds, which had descended so low they nearly touched the tops of the cypress trees.

Near the elevated water tower was an underground public bomb shelter. Benny Avni tried the iron door. It was unlocked. He entered and groped for the light switch, but the electricity to the shelter had been cut off. Even so, he descended the twelve steps. A damp, filthy flare brushed against him as he made his way into the depths of the dark space, feeling his way among vague objects—a pile of mattresses, a deteriorating cabinet. He took a deep breath of the thick air, then turned around, finding his way back toward the steps. At the top of the stairs, he tried the dead light switch again, then closed the iron door behind him and walked out into the empty street.

The breeze had subsided, and the fog had become thicker, erasing the contours of the houses, some of which were more than a hundred years old. The buildings' yellow stucco had cracked and crumbled, leaving intermittent bald spots on the walls. Gray pine trees grew in the yards. Walls of cypresses separated each house from the next. Occasionally he spotted an eroding baler or a rusting washtub in a tangle of overgrowing poison ivy, crabgrass, and morning glory.

Benny Avni whistled to the dog, but the mongrel kept his distance. In front of the synagogue—built when the village was founded, at the turn of the previous century—stood a kiosk displaying flyers for the local cinema and the winery, as well as posted notes from the council signed by Benny himself. Benny lingered over his notes, which for some reason seemed redundant or utterly false. Out of the corner of his eye, he thought he saw a stooped figure at the end of the street, but when he turned his head he saw only shrubs in the fog. The synagogue was topped with a metal menorah and its doors were decorated with carved lions and Stars of David. He climbed the five steps and tried the door. Inside the sanctuary, the air was cold, dusty, and almost dark. Above the curtain-covered ark, by the light of a dim electric candle, he read the inscription: "The Lord Is Always Before Me." Benny Avni wandered between the seats in the dark, then climbed the stairs to the women's gallery. Scattered on the benches were shabby black prayer books. The smell of old sweat mingled with the smell of ancient bindings. He felt one of the seats with his hand, because, for a moment, he thought a shawl or a scarf had been left behind.

As he exited the synagogue, the mon-

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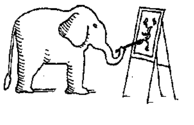

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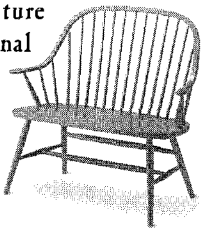

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grel was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs. This time he stomped his feet and said, "Go away! Scram!" The dog, on whose collar hung an identification tag, tilted his head and panted as if patiently awaiting an explanation. But no explanation came. Benny turned to go, his shoulders hunched and his bulky sweater peeking out from under his suède jacket, and he walked with broad strides, leaning forward like the figurehead of a ship breaking the waves. The dog followed, always keeping a safe distance.

Where had she gone? Perhaps she had decided to visit one of her girlfriends and had been delayed? Perhaps she'd been held late at school by some urgent matter? Perhaps she was at the clinic? A few weeks ago, when they were fighting, Nava had said that his kindness was like a mask, and under the mask: Siberia. He hadn't responded, but had smiled affectionately, as he always did when she was angry. This had caused Nava to lose her temper and shout, "You don't give a damn! Not about us or our children!" He'd continued to smile and had put his hand on her shoulder, but she'd thrown it off, storming out, slamming the door behind her. An hour later, he had entered her enclosed studio to give her a cup of hot herbal tea with honey. He had thought that she might be getting a slight cold. Which she wasn't. But Nava had accepted the tea and said, "Thanks. That really wasn't necessary."

And maybe while he was wandering alone in the fog she had arrived home? He considered returning. But the thought of the empty house—in particular, the thought of the empty bedroom with her colorful slippers like toy boats at the foot of the bed—repelled him and made him continue. He walked, stoop-shouldered, along Hagefen Street and Tarpat Street, until he reached Nava's primary school. Barely a month had passed since he'd won a debate against his District Council opponents and the Ministry of Education regarding the allocation of funds for four new classrooms and a large gymnasium.

The school's metal gates were already locked for the Sabbath. Both the building and the playground were surrounded by an iron fence topped with barbed wire. Benny Avni circled the fence twice until he found a spot where he thought he could penetrate. He waved to the dog on the opposite sidewalk, held the iron bars, hoisted himself up, pushed aside the wire, got cut, and jumped inside, twisting his ankle slightly. He limped across the playground, the back of his hand bleeding.

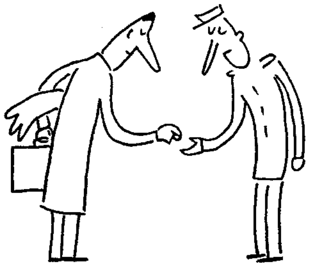
He entered the building through a side door and found himself in a long hallway, off of which branched many classrooms. The odor of sweat, leftover food, and blackboard chalk filled the air. Orange peels and scraps of paper littered the hallway. Benny Avni walked through a half-open door into one of the classrooms. On the teacher's desk sat a dusty blackboard eraser and a scribbled page from a notebook. He picked it up and examined the handwriting, which was indeed feminine but not Nava's. Benny Avni returned the now bloodstained page to the desk and looked at the blackboard. In the same feminine handwriting were the words "The Solemn Village Life Versus the Booming City Life—please complete no later than Wednesday." Under these instructions appeared the words "Read carefully at home the next three chapters and be prepared to answer all the questions at the back." On the wall hung portraits of Theodor Herzl, the President of the State, and the Prime Minister, as well as some illustrated placards, one of which said "Nature-Lovers Preserve and Protect the Wildflowers."

The desks were shoved together, likely a result of the students' rushing to the door when the bell sounded. In the window boxes, neglected geraniums thirsted. Opposite the teacher's desk hung a large map of Israel, with a thick green circle around the village of Tel Ilan, in the foothills of the Menashe region. An orphaned jacket hung on a hook.

Benny Avni left the classroom and continued, limping slightly, along the empty corridors, the dripping blood marking his path. As he reached the bathrooms at the end of the hallway, he felt compelled to enter the women's facilities. There were five stalls. Benny Avni checked behind each door, even going so far as to investigate the janitorial-supply closet. He then turned down another hallway, and yet another, before he finally found the teachers' lounge.

Standing outside the door, he hesitated for a moment, fingering the inscription "Teachers Lounge—Students Not Allowed Without Permission," as if it were written in Braille. It occurred to him that a meeting might be taking place, and he didn't want to interrupt, yet at the same time he felt an urge to barge in. The lounge, however, was deserted and dark, its windows tightly closed and its curtains drawn. Two rows of bookshelves stood on either side of the room. Dead center was a long table, surrounded by approximately twenty chairs, and, on the table, empty and half-empty cups, a few books, class logs, and some pamphlets. By the farthest window he saw a large cabinet with a separate drawer for each teacher. He found Nava's drawer, removed it, and placed it on the table. Inside, he found a pile of notebooks, a box of chalk, a few throat lozenges, and an empty sunglasses case. After some reflection, Benny replaced the drawer. At the end of the table, hanging on the back of a chair, was a scarf that looked familiar to him; it resembled one of Nava's. But how could he be sure in this dim light? Nevertheless, he took it, used it to blot his bloody hand, then folded it and placed it in his jacket pocket. He left the teachers' lounge, limping along the multi-doored hallway, peeking into every classroom as he passed. He tried the door of the school's health center, glanced into the janitor's office, and then finally left the building, exiting by a different door from the one through which he had entered. He limped across the playground, climbed the fence, held back the barbed wire, and jumped, this time at the expense of a sharp slice in the sleeve of his jacket.

He stood for a while at the foot of the fence, waiting without realizing what he was waiting for, until he saw the dog sitting on the opposite side of the street about ten metres away, looking at him with deep earnestness. It occurred to him to pet the dog. But the dog rose, stretched, and paced slowly forward, keeping his distance.



For fifteen minutes, Benny Avni limped after the dog in the empty streets, bandaging his bleeding hand with the checkered scarf that might be Nava's or maybe not. The low gray sky was tangling with the treetops as murky blotches of fog rested in the yards. Perhaps a few drops of rain touched his face, but he wasn't sure and, frankly, didn't care. He thought he saw a bird on a wall, but as he drew closer he realized that it was just an empty tin box.

Soon he came to a narrow lane between two tall hedges of bougainvillea. He'd recently authorized it to be repaved, and a few mornings ago had inspected it in person. From the lane, he again reached Synagogue Street. The dog walked ahead as if showing him the way. The light was even grayer than before. He asked himself, Would it not be better to go straight home? After all, she might have returned and was perhaps resting, puzzled by his absence, maybe even worried about him. But the thought of the empty house terrified him, and he went on, limping, following the dog, who never looked back, his muzzle lowered as if sniffing the way. Soon—possibly before dusk—a heavy rain would wash clean all the dusty trees and rooftops and sidewalks. He thought about what could have been but would likely never be. Then his thoughts wandered away. Nava was in the habit of sitting with the girls on the back porch, overlooking the lemon trees, the three of them talking in low voices. What they discussed he had never known, nor really cared to know. Yet now he cared but was clueless. He felt that he must reach a decision, but even though he was accustomed to making multiple decisions every day at work, he was suddenly seized with doubt, and had no idea what in the world was expected of him. In the meantime, the dog stopped and sat on the sidewalk ten metres away, and Benny followed suit, sitting on the Memorial Park bench where Nava had apparently been two or three hours earlier. He scooted himself to the middle of the bench, his bleeding hand wrapped in the scarf, his jacket buttoned up against the slight rain that was beginning to fall, and there he sat, waiting for his wife. ♦

(*Translated, from the Hebrew, by Jill Sand D'Angelo and Amos Oz.*)

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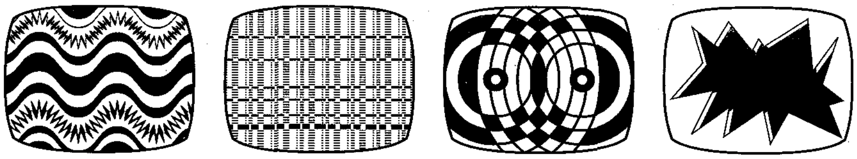


A CRITIC AT LARGE

MAN OF FETTERS

Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

The historian who sets out to write a new biography of Samuel Johnson is in more or less the same position as someone who sets out to write a day-by-day account of the life of Samuel Pepys. Although the promise is to see the thing from a new angle, the truth is that the thing and the angle it was seen from originally are essentially the same. Samuel Johnson was a fine poet, a good if solemn essayist, and an inspired critic of other people's writing. But the Johnson we remember is the one James Boswell wrote down. Great wits abound. The novelist Reggie Turner was, most people agreed, the wittiest talker of the eighteen-nineties, not a bad vintage for witty talkers; when he eventually got a biography, not a single witty remark remained, and his life sank with his Life. Johnson survives because Boswell was there to write down that when Johnson was asked if any man alive could have written the pseudo-bard Ossian's poems he said, "Yes, sir, many men, many women, and many children," and that when he was asked his view of "Gulliver's Travels" he said, "When once you have thought of big men and little men, it is very easy to do all the rest," and that when a dense disciple said, "I don't understand you, Sir," Johnson, speaking for every teacher, said, "Sir, I have found you an argument, but I am not obliged to find you an understanding," and that he observed of a pious libertine, "Yes, sir, no man is a hypocrite in his pleasures." He lives in his talk, and his talk lives because of his listener.

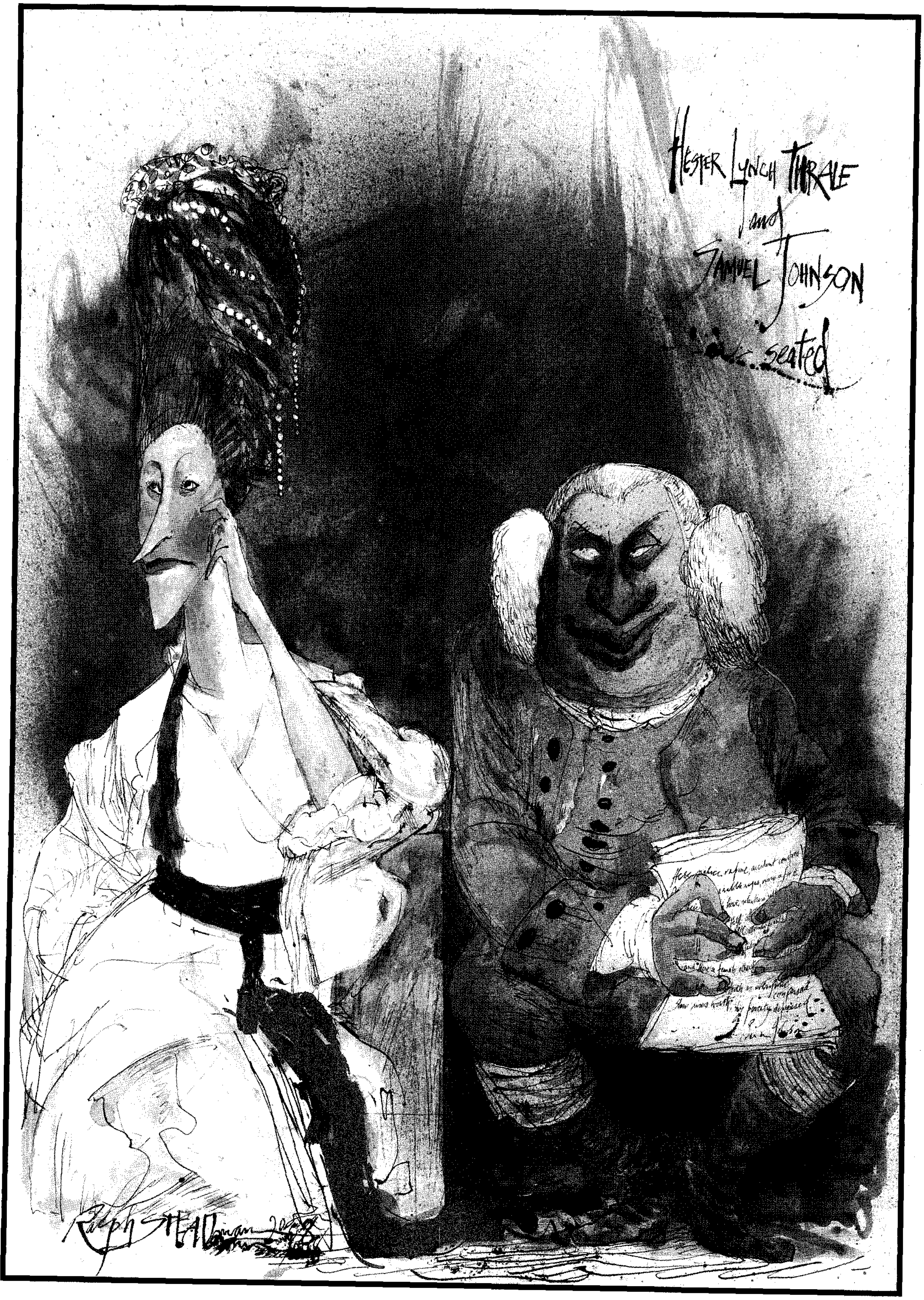
"To be regarded in his own age as a classic, and in ours as a companion!" Thomas Macaulay wrote half a century after Johnson's death. "Those peculiarities of manner, and that careless table-talk, the memory of which, he probably thought, would die with him, are likely to be remembered as long as the English language is spoken in any quarter of the globe." Boswell's Johnson is, in some sense, the first recorded modern personality, whose character is reflected in habits and tics and addictions, in the minutiae of a literary life—his cat Hodge, his orange peels, his unintentional sideways sallies—as much as in neatly set virtues and vices.

Yet the reasons that Boswell's life of Johnson needs supplement form a little litany: Boswell didn't really know him that well, or spend that many days with him (scarcely six months over twenty-some years); he knew him only later in life, when the once hungry Johnson had been stuffed with food and fame; he underrated his poetry and overrated his piety. Two new lives, Peter Martin's "Samuel Johnson" (Harvard; $35) and Jeffrey Meyers's "Samuel Johnson: The Struggle" (Basic; $35), continue the attempt to make Johnson radical and romantic and all the things that Boswell is supposed to have missed. In Martin's biography, Johnson becomes so dark and stormy, so beset by sin and fringed by insanity, that he might as well be a full-fledged romantic hero, a Captain Ahab spearing china whales. This view is not exactly false, but it is falsely stressed. That his sanity was won against a sea of troubles, in a "life radically wretched," as he described it, doesn't alter the reality that it is his sanity that we love him for: he was his own whale, and brought himself home.

Still, there was one large topic upon which Boswell cannot be relied. It is Johnson's relation to Hester Thrale—the woman he lived with, whom he loved, and who wrote the only contemporaneous account that gives a credibly different picture of what the great man was like. Meyers, to his credit, tries to look frankly at the evidence about their peculiar erotic relation. The result is to make Johnson even more of a personality, and less of a pedant; he emerges as a man of passion and pain, given and taken, a professor of desire.

Samuel Johnson arrived in London in March of 1737, at the age of twenty-seven. He was escaping from a failed effort to run a country school, along with his prize pupil, a twenty-year-old would-be actor named David Garrick. Although Garrick made his way to the stage, and to stardom, in short order, Johnson had no luck in *his* dream, of becoming a London writer and wit, for a very long time. He had the misfortune to have arrived in London in a time not unlike this one, with the old-media dispensation in crisis and the new media barely paying. The practice of aristocratic patronage, in which big shots paid to be flattered by their favorite writers, was ebbing, and the new, middle-class arrangement, where plays and novels could command real money from publishers, was not yet in place. The only way to make a living was to publish, for starvation wages, in the few magazines that had come into existence. Johnson worked as a miscellaneous journalist, carrying his clips around and begging for assignments. In his first years, he wrote translations from the French and from the classics, brief popular lives of military men, and pamphlets mocking the government. Then he found work as an all-purpose rewrite man at the *Gentleman's Magazine*. He always remembered how grateful he was to find an inn where he could get a decent meal for half a shilling. (The new order had also produced a permanently bitter and underemployed class of writers, who had meant to be Popes but were left to be merely beggars in the

Johnson could be rough with Hester Thrale in conversation, but his letters hint at his distinctly masochistic tastes.


Hester Lynch Thrale
and
Samuel Johnson
seated
Ralph Steadman 2008

RALPH STEADMAN; OPPOSITE: PIERRE DI SCIULLO

square outside, and they made their living working for penny-a-line pamphlets and cheap gossip tabloids, creating a constant mouse scream of malice that runs in counterpoint to Johnson's grave sonorities.) He left a wife behind in his native town of Litchfield, a widow who was considerably older, and whom he had once imagined wowing with his London triumphs.

The one good thing about these years was that whatever tendency to pedantry Johnson had was knocked out of him. As a boy, he had been a kind of prodigy, pressed forward by his overeager father, a bookseller; a brief stay at Oxford, at a time when it was still very much a rich boys' school, had left him embittered, and that short time as a failed country schoolmaster had not made him happier. But in London he became friends with real writers, neither dons nor lowlifes but men who wrote for a hard living: Richard Savage, the passionate, charismatic, and sometimes homeless poet who had the exquisite manners of the misplaced aristocrat he claimed to be; the bizarre fraud George Psalmanazar, who pretended to have been raised in Formosa and who had invented a Formosan language; printer's devils and booksellers and players, like Thomas Sheridan (Richard's father) and, later, Samuel Foote. Rather touchingly, Johnson took them all at their own estimation, valuing Psalmanazar as a sage and taking seriously Savage's ridiculous claim to be the long-neglected heir of a countess. He wasn't neglected; one of his first published poems, "London," which tried to anatomize the shock of his arrival in the city, got the approval and endorsement of Pope—as though a young man arriving in New York were to have his first novel blurbed by Philip Roth. But kind words buttered no parsnips.

Johnson's political philosophy, a combination of authoritarian politics, charitable impulses, anti-imperialism, and Christian faith, was forged on the streets and in the garrets and through that life as a grinder in the seventeen-thirties and forties; despite what some biographers have suggested, it was not dreamed up afterward, in comfort. His was a hungry man's hard-hearted view of life, more like Merle Haggard's conservatism than like his later friend Edmund Burke's. The self-classified reformers, Johnson insisted, are in pursuit of only their own narrow interests, not those of the common people. He loved to tell the story of challenging Mrs. Macaulay, "a great republican," to prove her sincerity about social equality by asking her footman to dine at her table. ("She has never liked me since. Sir, your levellers wish to level *down* as far as themselves; but they cannot bear levelling *up* to themselves.") Life is hard, and there is little that government can do to make it easier. No one was less paternalistic, or puritanical, about the poor and their pleasures than Johnson: give them all the gin and fairgrounds they want, they have little enough else, God knows. ("Life is a pill which none of us can bear to swallow without gilding; yet for the poor we delight in stripping it still barer.") In the two sets of occasional essays that he wrote in the seventeen-fifties—"The Rambler" and "The Idler"—a pet theme is that government, good and ill, is at a remove from actual life. As he wrote, in lines that he sneaked into his friend Oliver Goldsmith's poem "The Traveller," "How small, of all that human hearts endure, / That part which law or kings can cause or cure."

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"Nice landing, Captain Crunch."

There was no cure for the human condition, he thought, not least his own. He was a prisoner of compulsions. A monster of a man, with a huge and powerful frame, and a blunt bulldog head set above it, he could pick up warring street dogs and toss them aside like kittens, and once beat an insolent publisher senseless with a folio volume. Yet since his youth he had suffered from a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder, or even Tourette's syndrome, which became aggravated with the years. Walking down a London alley, he had to touch every post with his cane, and, if he missed one, would go back and start over; he constantly spoke to himself, repeating half-audible incantations under his breath, and would sit in a reverie for hours, muttering and whistling; when he peeled an orange, he always had to keep the peel in his pocket.

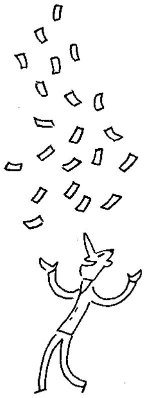
Still, the pill of life could be sweetened—above all, with friendship. Johnson made a religion of social life: he ate with friends every night, adored his small circle of intimates, and eventually insisted that "the Literary Club" they formed was the best club in the history of mankind. (Goldsmith, Reynolds, and Burke were charter members.) "My life is one long escape from myself," he said, and he ran to the table to get away. There are few finer moments in his conversation than his descriptions of the consolation of fast coaches bearing pretty women, and, especially, good food in well-run taverns:

> There is no private house, (said he,) in which people can enjoy themselves so well, as at a capital tavern. Let there be ever so great plenty of good things, ever so much grandeur, ever so much elegance, ever so much desire that every body should be easy; in the nature of things it cannot be: there must always be some degree of care and anxiety. The master of the house is anxious to entertain his guests; the guests are anxious to be agreeable to him. . . . Whereas, at a tavern, there is a general freedom from anxiety. You are sure you are welcome: and the more noise you make, the more trouble you give, the more good things you call for, the welcomer you are.

Johnson was often a sad man but never a secluded one. He dreamed not of solitude but of becoming the good-humored, well-mannered, "sophisticated" man for all seasons that was always his beau ideal. The matchless pleasure of reading Boswell's book lies in the run of Johnson's normal conversation; his common sense on lawyering and doctoring, on publishing and soldiering. A sailor in a boat is a man in jail with a chance of being drowned. Fame is a shuttlecock, which must be struck at both ends to be kept up. It is affectation to pretend to feel the distress of others as much as they do themselves. A lawyer is expected to make the best case he can no matter what his own opinion. (Will a lawyer then become a liar because he is expected to lie for his client? "Sir, a man will no more carry the artifice of the bar into the common intercourse of society, than a man who is paid for tumbling upon his hands will continue to tumble on his hands when he should walk on his feet.") To imply that this worldly wisdom served merely to conceal his struggle is to miss what he was struggling *for*—which was, always, to "endeavour to see things as they are, and then enquire whether we ought to complain." (Though, he added, "whether to see life as it is, will give us much consolation, I know not.")

Every famous man gets reduced to a single word: Darwin is evolution, Wilde is wit, Mill is liberty, and Johnson is his dictionary. In Johnson's own lifetime, he was called Dictionary Johnson, and had Boswell not lived it's probably how he would still dimly be remembered. His real breakthrough was, in a way, an entrepreneurial one: rather than knock one's head against the hard rock of penny-a-line journalism forever, he came up with a project large enough to get attention and attract subscribers. He began the dictionary with a consortium of booksellers (i.e., boutique publishers) in 1746, and worked on it tirelessly until he brought it to publication, a decade later, a time also marked by the death of his wife. ("I have known what it was to have a wife," he told a later visitor. "And I have known what it was to lose a wife. It had almost broke my heart.")

The dictionary's ostensible purpose of settling and "fixing" the language was a chimera. Its real, implicit purpose was to reassure a growing new world of middle-class readers that there *were* rules, and someone who could give them. Young men on the street, people in boats on the Thames, bluestockings at dinner parties would stop him, gather up their courage, and ask him how to pronounce "irreparable." Johnson was sometimes annoyed by the constant demands on him to be the No. 1 Word Man, full of wise definings. As he said once, "we all *know* what light is; but it is not easy to *tell* what it is."

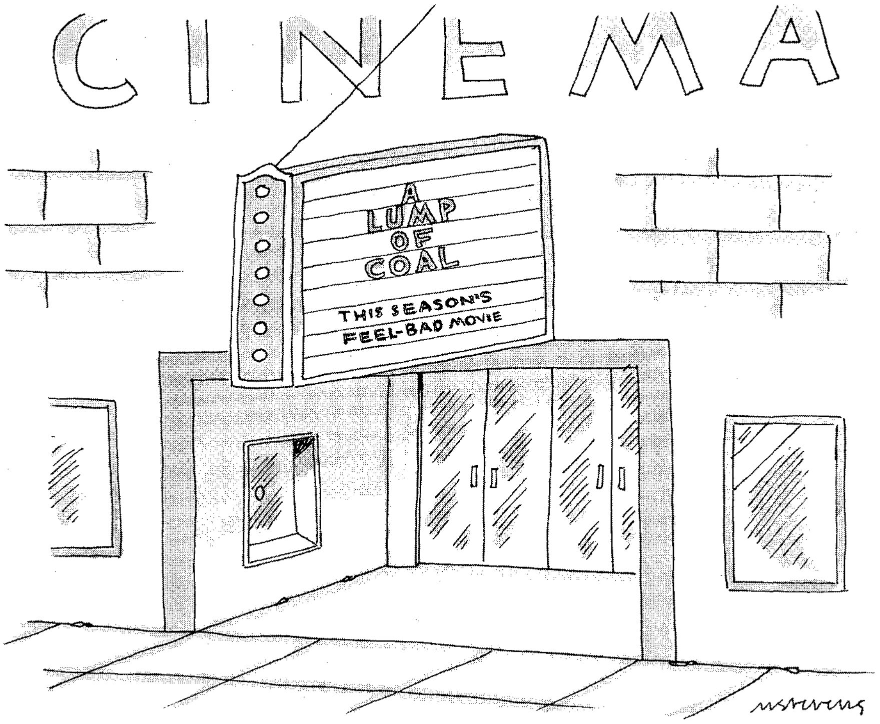


Still, it was after the dictionary that Johnson became Johnson, the Great Cham of literature (the reference was to a Tatar monarch of the day), and the Dictator of the Dinner Parties. He received a pension from the Whig government for his merits as the language fixer, though it entailed occasional jobs of hack political pamphleteering. From then on, he could be stirred mostly by rare efforts at subscription writing—an edition of Shakespeare, in 1765, and his "Lives of the Poets" series, in 1779, may be the most consistently entertaining works of criticism in English—which he approached in a deliberately offhand manner. (He begins his discussion of the plays of Congreve by saying that it's been a long time since he's read them.) The subscription books gave him enough money to live decently and at last rent a house, which he charitably filled with the flotsam and jetsam of his hard years; a blind woman who he thought was gifted, a quack doctor who had a quiet practice among the poor.

A certain contraction set into his social life, which was partly natural with advancing age: from the seventeen-sixties to his death, in 1784, at the age of seventy-five, his life was much more one of dinner parties than of common tables—he was leaving tavern and eating-house London for a more inward-turning middle-class, and increasingly suburban, London literary scene. This was the world in which Boswell knew him, after the older man befriended him, in 1763, and although the younger man sought out the relationship, it was the older man who sealed it. "Give me your hand," Johnson said. "I have taken a liking to you." In the past century, we have come to know Boswell, through his never published and amazingly candid journals, about as well as we know anyone in history. His tastes, raw and insatiable, were for whores in the gutter and drinking until dawn; yet his essential sweetness of temper kept Johnson sweet, too. Johnson is almost always happy in his company, and this gives his Boswellian sayings a benevolence absent from other records of his life.

The two institutions that meant most to Johnson in the sixties and seventies were his Literary Club and the dining table of a couple called the Thrales. Henry was a rich brewer—his father had founded Anchor Ale, which still thrives—and a member of Parliament, and an early figure of the bourgeois ascendancy, though at the time he was regarded by the best people as a mere tradesman. The Thrales, well fed, curious, sure of themselves but avid for "culture," were the kind of people who made literature possible by paying for it, or, in this case, by giving it a room upstairs. They sought out the company of writers and musicians, and, one night in 1765, dazzled by Johnson's talk at a friend's dinner, they took to him, recognized his essential loneliness, and, within months, adopted him as a member of their household, with a room of his own at their green and leafy and light-filled house at Streatham. Although Johnson, a self-made man who admired others, clearly respected Thrale, everyone but Boswell agreed that it was the lady of the house who kept him there. For almost twenty years, he lived in closer intimacy with her than with anyone else.

Hester Thrale, the subject of a biography just published in Britain—"Hester," by Ian McIntyre (Constable; £25)—is one of the most appealing people of the late eighteenth century, and part of her appeal is the modernity, the immediacy, of her appetites and frailties. Tiny and pretty, vivacious and unguarded and hungry for life in a way that puts one more in mind of the women of the nineteen-twenties than those of the seventeen-sixties, she had been married off young. Like so many women of her time, she soon became a baby machine, having eight children in hardly more years, only four of whom lived. She was a loving and devoted mother, though not much of a disciplinarian, and the children seem to have overrun the house.



Henry Thrale turned out to be both cold and a philanderer; he had a long affair with a soft, weepy beauty who was everything Hester wasn't. Hester was not soft but smart, liked to entertain and perform, and dominated the table in a fizzy, half-distracted way. But she had, as Johnson saw at once, a core of gentle empathy; she was one of those sprightly, satiric people who go right to the edge and over it, with what he called an "exuberance of flattery and a temerity of censure"—and then always clamber back, apologizing for making one wisecrack too many. Once, a young Italian musician named Gabriel Piozzi came to pay a visit and sang a melodramatic aria. Hester stood behind him and, for the benefit of her friends, mimicked his gestures and over-the-top singing. It was funny until it wasn't. Her friend Fanny Burney quietly chided her, and, just as quickly as she had mocked, Hester began to develop a respect for the foreign young man who had taken her mockery not with anger but with dignity. She later hired him to be her daughters' music teacher.

Boswell often forced his way into the Thrale household. Mrs. Thrale very nicely said that he had a "gold ticket" to the table, and for almost twenty years she, Boswell, and Johnson worked out the geometry of a complicated triangle of shared passions and resentments: the younger woman and the younger man each establishing a special intimacy with the older man; the older man half in love with the woman while remaining on respectful terms with her husband; the younger man jealous of the woman's hold on his mentor while still recognizing that he alone could play the role of the son that the older man had never had. There's a wonderful passage in the "Life" when, as Boswell records, he and Hester looked at each other after some Johnsonian moment, recognizing that, as she whispered to him, "There are many who admire and respect Mr. Johnson; but you and I LOVE him." The stress is, in every sense, in the original.

Johnson was rough on her in conversation, even rougher than he could be with Boswell. ("Sir, you have but two topicks, yourself and me. I am sick of both," he once burst out.) Hester recalled that, if she complained about feeling ill, Johnson, "who thinks no body poor till they want a Dinner . . . would only suppose I was calling for Attention." But Johnson was candid with her in a way that he could not be with anyone else, and it was Hester, not Boswell, who was expected by all their friends to write the definitive life of the great man. He cast himself in the role of lover, passionate and confessional—"Dearest Lady," he called her, whereas he called everyone else "Sir" or "Madam"—and she had to toy with that role, to see how it took. He explained to her that he was always in extremes: "I am very noisy, or very silent, very gloomy or very merry, very sour or very kind." She alone, he said, "could manage me, and spare me the solicitude of managing myself." Some of the "management" he wanted from her dealt with his lifelong struggle with his mental disorders: the obsessive-compulsive behavior, the spells of despondency. He confided to her his fear of going mad, and gave her a padlock to use in confining him if he did. After her death, when her estate was auctioned, an article labelled "Johnson's padlock" appeared in her effects.

But some of the management seems to have spoken to his sexual obsessions, too. Gossip about their sexual connection raged in their time, without resolution. Boswell, in his journals, writes of Oliver Goldsmith showing him a couple of scandalous newspaper paragraphs about Johnson and Mrs. Thrale, reporting "how an eminent brewer was very jealous of a certain author in folio, and perceived a strong resemblance to him in his eldest son." It was only in the past century, however, that two letters of Johnson's, written in French (which the servants could not read and which was the recognized language of erotic experiment), turned up. In them, Johnson addresses Hester as "Mistress," begs her to "spare me the need to constrain myself, by taking away the power to leave the room when you want me to stay," and asks her to "keep me in that form of slavery which you know so well how to make blissful." She wrote back at length, saying that "you were saying on Sunday that of all the unhappy you were the happiest, in consequence of my Attention to your Complaint." Lest anyone doubt what was meant by this, and other half-reproachful, half-teasing answering letters, she later wrote, in her "Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson," "Says Johnson a Woman has *such* power between the Ages of twenty five and forty five, that She may tye a Man to a post and whip him if She will," and appended to this an unequivocal footnote: "This he knew of him self was *literally* and *strictly* true."

Both Martin and McIntyre are cautious about all this, though McIntyre does not hesitate to call Johnson a masochist, allowing, "The word was new, but the perversion was not." The scholar Katherine

Balderston, who edited Thrale's diaries sixty years ago, first had the courage to write that “it seems inescapably evident that his compulsive fantasy assumed a masochistic form, in which the impulse to self-abasement and pain predominated,” and Meyers follows her. “Despite the overwhelming evidence of Johnson's darkest secret, his modern biographers have not been able to reconcile his obsession with their exalted image of the great moralist,” he writes, concluding that Johnson was drawn to flagellation, and pulled Hester into his private erotic theatre. “The closet drama of his ritualistic whippings,” Meyers writes, gave Johnson “masochistic pleasure in pain and humiliation, which both satisfied and punished his sexual urges.”

Johnson certainly wouldn't be alone among strong critics in having such tastes; the list includes Lytton Strachey and Kenneth Tynan. Yet the sense of shame is, for such men, usually stronger even than the sexual appetite. (Kathleen Tynan wrote of her husband's inability to come to terms with his fetish because of his need to think well of himself.) Johnson's piety is more impressive if we imagine it up against the keen daily edge of erotic appetite, rather than simply a long-term bulwark against imagined insanity. Compare him with C. S. Lewis, who modelled himself on Johnson, and we recall that Lewis, too, becomes human when at the end of his life he wanted something, the physical love of his American mistress. We love Johnson for his humanity, and what makes us human is the contest between our desires and our doctrines.

Johnson had a reputation as a swingeing critic, and in conversation he could be brutal. But in his critical essays he approaches the seat of judgment and then almost always abdicates it: “The inquiry, how far man may extend his designs, or how high he may rate his native force, is of far greater dignity than in what rank we shall place any particular performance.” And, again: “To circumscribe poetry by a definition will only show the narrowness of the definer.” Good writing, for Johnson, is a mixture of page-turning and point-making, enthralling readers while teaching them, too. It ought always to be true to life: bad things should happen to good people, and good things should happen to bad; virtue should not be too readily rewarded and vice not too hotly punished. Yet true to life might mean something true as an allegory is truthful—morally exact in a stylized way—or true as an anecdote is truthful, just the way it really happened. Truth could be illustrative or inspirational, but, beyond that, anything goes.

No critic has ever been wiser about the limits of criticism, and about how few rules can ever be made for writing; Johnson is the model of a reactive critic, seeing when a piece of writing was made, and how it works, then and now. His premise was always that something that had long pleased readers must have pleased them for a reason; sometimes it was because of a quality or a problem in their time that had made the work seem briefly pleasing, sometimes it was because of some permanent quality of imagination or truth. The critic's job was to distinguish between what belonged to the history of taste and what belonged to the canon of art, and to try to explain what made the permanently pleasing permanently please. For Johnson's great question is not how to write, or what to write, but why write. His criticism provides a simple answer: to help us enjoy life more, or endure it better.

Johnson has no illusions about criticism's ability to fix or cure. Critics are to writers not as doctors are to patients but as bearded ladies are to trapeze artists—another, sadder act in the same big show. “Every man can exert such judgment as he has upon the work of others; and he whom nature has made weak, and idleness keeps ignorant may yet support his vanity by the name of a critic,” he wrote. His low opinion of the professional critic gave him a high opinion of the amateur reader. He voices our doubts more than he does his period's platitudes, and tells the truth about tedious texts: nobody ever wanted “Paradise Lost” to be longer than it is; metaphysical poetry is fascinating but exhausting to read; Shakespeare's puns can be tiresome and his clowns unfunny. The worst of literary faults for him is, exactly, tediousness. “We read Milton for instruction, retire harassed and over-burdened, and look elsewhere for recreation; we desert our master and seek for companions.” (His firmest statement on art was that it should be “harmless pleasure.” He knew it would shock in its Philistinism, but he stood by it.) Johnson was certainly “serious” about literature, but he thought

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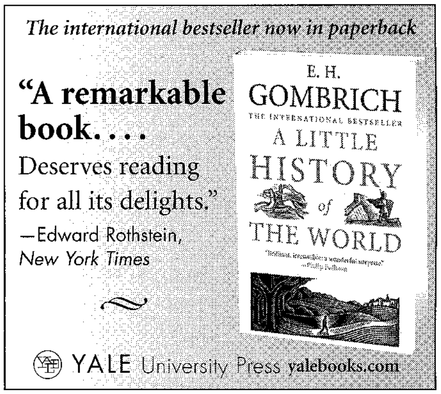

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that writing was serious as conversation is serious, an occasion for wit and argument, not as sex and sermons are serious, a repository of fears and hungers.

When Henry Thrale died, in 1781—grief-stricken at the death of his only son, he more or less ate himself to death—Johnson's circle took it for granted that he would marry Hester. It was a way of attaching themselves for life, and perhaps also a way of making shaming sexual acts somehow acceptable. One of the cheap morning papers announced that she had made it a condition of their marriage that "the Doctor should immediately discard his bush-wig, wear a clean shirt and shave every day." Boswell, in a fit of crazy jealousy, wrote a semi-obscene poem—which, in a saving fit of good sense, he did not publish until later—about their courtship. ("My dearest darling," he has Johnson say, "view your slave, / Behold him as your very Scrub, / Ready to write as author grave, / Or govern well the brewing tub.") Hester, drenched in all that malice, lamented, "There is no mercy for me in this Island."

But she gathered her forces, and had news for Johnson. Against the violent disapproval of her children, and all her friends—against the temper of her time and the habits of her class—she had fallen in love with Signor Piozzi, the modest music teacher she had once mocked, and she was determined to marry him. This was, she wrote, "a Connection which you must have heard of by many People, but I suppose never believed. Indeed, my dear Sir, it was concealed only to spare us both needless pain: I could not have borne to reject that Counsel it would have killed me to take." She loved Johnson, but his neediness must have been claustrophobia-inducing. She had been closeted with a genius and his compulsions for twenty years, and now, rather than padlock herself in with him, she looked out the little window, and saw another life.

In Georgian England, it was the scandal of the decade. "I see the English newspapers are full of gross Insolence towards me," she moaned. One had written that Thrale could never have imagined "his wife's disgrace, by eventually raising an obscure and penniless Fiddler into sudden Wealth." How *could* she, everyone, her daughters included, demanded? And most came to a simple conclusion: it was pure sex, and size—his "battering ram," as the obscene pamphleteers called it.

We can sense now what happened. Mrs. Thrale wanted a relationship more sunnily sensual; Dr. Johnson wanted *her*, and attributed her rejection of him not to the obvious appeal of a handsome and self-confidently physical Italian lover but to her guilt, which she must feel because he felt it even more. He wrote her two letters in quick succession. In the first, he inveighed, "If you have abandoned your children and your religion, God forgive your wickedness; if you have forfeited your fame and your country, may your folly do no further mischief." A few days later, his tone was bewilderingly different: "Whatever you have done, I have no pretence to resent, as it has not been injurious to me. I wish that God might grant you every blessing. Prevail upon Mr. Piozzi to settle in England. You may live here with more dignity than in Italy, and with more security. . . . Every argument of prudence and interest is for England, and only some phantoms of imagination seduce you to Italy." Doubtless he hoped that keeping her near might enable him to keep her close. But she had made up her mind, and was soon off to the South. Her children cut her off, and her friends mourned her madness.

For Boswell, it was a kind of triumph: Johnson was his. The one person with the materials to write a rival life had fled the field. For Johnson, though, Hester's flight was a death sentence. He survived the shock of her loss for only five months, sinking into a depression, which turned into paralysis and death. His intimates found him consumed by guilt and fear. Boswell, in the final volume of his life, records an unforgettable moment from Johnson's last year:

> *Johnson:* I am afraid I may be one of those who shall be damned (looking dismally).
>
> *Dr. Adams:* What do you mean by damned?
>
> *Johnson:* (passionately and loudly) Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastingly.

Johnson's terror at the end was so unsettling to his intimates that Boswell offers, by way of explanation, the observation that Johnson's "amorous inclinations were uncommonly strong and impetuous," that "Johnson was not free from propensities which were ever 'warring against the law of his mind'—and that in his combats with them, he was sometimes overcome." What makes him so sympathetic is that his sense of Christian faith proceeds from his sense of himself as a sinner, not as the saved. Where others were sure of feeling superior to the people who didn't believe, Johnson was just hoping to get to Heaven on a lucky break—praying for mercy, but not counting on it. He had managed to take every struggle in his life and turn it into a form of sense; save for this last one, which, being rooted in the senselessness of sexual desire, ended, for him, in shame.

Mrs. Thrale rushed her collection of anecdotes into publication after Johnson's death; it was Boswell who wrote the great book, astonishing all those who thought he was too much the sot to ever write anything, and libelling Hester throughout. Hers was, however, the last, or, anyway, the loudest, laugh. She and Piozzi, shunned by all, went off to Italy and had the happiest and most fulfilled of marriages. "Living at Venice is like a Journey to the Moon somehow," she wrote home, in an effort to convince her children that she had done the right thing after all. "And a sweet Planet it is!" It was the first of the great romantic escapes that would mark the next century, from Mary Shelley to Elizabeth Barrett: Italy now meant not merely ruins and Raphael, education in ancient cities, but sex and sunshine, love in a warm climate. "I drop one Petticoat after another like the Rope dancers," she announced to her daughters gleefully. The faithful student of the last great Augustan became the first great Romantic refugee. She had lost his life and found her own.

Life has, as Johnson said, a way of pointing toward morals, but, as he also knew, they are rarely the morals we expect to be pointed toward. Mrs. Thrale did the disgraceful thing, and was rewarded with a serene and happy second life. Boswell took the diaries and journals he had piled up in a wasted lifetime of sensual pleasures and obsessive self-regard and turned them into one of the best and most enduring books ever written. It is a love triangle, certainly, but the shapes that the three points describe seem still to be in motion. Love, like light, is a thing that is enacted better than defined: we know it afterward by the traces it leaves on paper. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Rimbaud, *by Edmund White (Atlas & Co.; $24).* Yeats once said that the writer must decide between the life or the work, but Arthur Rimbaud—teen-age prodigy, archetypal rebel, African adventurer—chose both. Although White notes that "a biographer of Rimbaud could fill his pages with nothing but his ceaseless comings and goings," his own account is slim and skillfully blends action and analysis. White declares his personal infatuation—even speculating that an affair with a teacher as "an unhappy gay adolescent" may have been inspired by Rimbaud's example—but he is clear-headed about his idol's shortcomings. Rimbaud's contempt for bourgeois life certainly made him an impossible visitor: if he wasn't selling the guest-room furniture, he was using the magazine in which his host's poetry had just appeared as toilet paper. White ultimately agrees with those of Rimbaud's acquaintance who saw him not "as an angel or a devil but as an obnoxious boor."

The Man Who Believed He Was King of France, *by Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, translated from the Italian by William McCuaig (Chicago; $25).* In 1354, during the Hundred Years' War, a Sienese merchant named Giannino di Guccio became convinced that he was actually King Jean I—the rightful heir to the Capetian crown, who was thought to have died in infancy. Over the following years, he trekked through Italy, Hungary, and France seeking recognition from various sovereigns; forged documents supporting his claim; attired himself in royal garb; hired a mercenary army; incurred the wrath of Pope Innocent VI; and escaped, briefly, from prison. Self-proclaimed sovereigns were common in the era, and many contemporaries dismissed Giannino as a fraud. But there were also many who, for political or monetary gain, egged him on. Falconieri painstakingly pieces together the events surrounding his hero's doomed bid in a narrative that reads like an adventure story.

I See You Everywhere, *by Julia Glass (Pantheon; $24.95).* This quietly powerful family history is the author's third novel; her début, "Three Junes," won the National Book Award. At the center of the story are two sisters: Louisa is four years older than Clement, and "also nearly four inches shorter and about four decades more full of opinions." Over the course of twenty-five years, the two grow up, fall in love with startling frequency, and confront challenges that reveal the impossibility of truly knowing another person, even a sibling. At first, the sisters seem dangerously close to stereotypes—the elder bookish and reserved, the younger boisterous and boy-crazy—but the book's almost Biblical scope does not come at the expense of strikingly sensual detail. Glass sees the bond of sisterhood as "a double helix, two souls coiling around a common axis, joined yet never touching."

Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio, *by Amara Lakhous, translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein (Europa; $14.95).* A cacophony of voices fills this novel, whose putative plot concerns the murder of a man known as the Gladiator in an apartment building in Rome. One by one, the neighbors offer their querulous, seemingly tangential testimony: an Iranian immigrant explains how he sewed his mouth shut when his petition for refugee status was denied; a lonely Peruvian maid confesses, "The TV is my new family"; a grief-stricken woman accuses Chinese restaurateurs of kidnapping her dog; a Milanese professor sees in the daily desecration of the building's elevator (by litter, by urine) the decline of civilization. The author's real subject is the heave and crush of modern, polyglot Rome, and he renders the jabs of everyday speech with such precision that the novel feels exclaimed rather than written.

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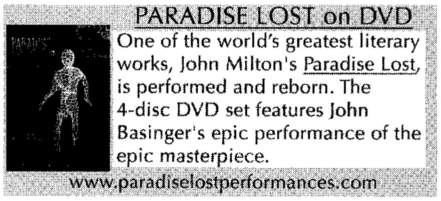

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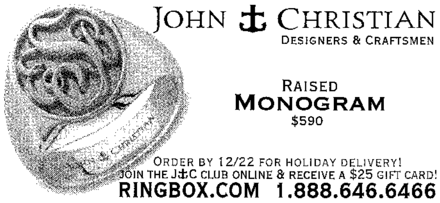

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Scenes from the Next Wave Festival.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

For most of the twentieth century, the Young Turks of American dance did not make ballets. Their game was modern dance, and they routinely insulted ballet as being shallow and reactionary—light entertainment for society women. Then, around the nineteen-eighties, all this changed: modern-dance choreographers began making ballets. Several trends of the eighties—the fascination with high-low; the postmodern fondness for artifice, as opposed to the “realness” embraced by prior avant-gardes—no doubt nudged them in that direction, but I would guess that economics also played a part. Ballet is America’s most popular form of theatrical dance, and that translates into pay. Today, a respected freelance choreographer making a piece for a large ballet company will earn a commission of perhaps fifty thousand to a hundred thousand dollars. By contrast, a modern-dance company’s New York season will almost always lose money.

The first so-called “crossover” choreographer was Twyla Tharp, who made a piece, “Deuce Coupe,” for the Joffrey Ballet in 1973. Her lead was soon followed by hordes of others. In most of these pieces, however, ballet was not fully absorbed. In a regular classical work, the academic ballet technique—passé, chassé, the rest—is the language. That’s what the performers speak, just as Dante’s sinners speak Italian and Proust’s duchesses speak French. But, to use a language in that way, you have to have been heavily trained in it, and most of the modern-dance choreographers were not. Furthermore, you have to take it for granted, see it as transparent, and, again, this was not the attitude of most of the newcomers. Ballet, with its high, open chest and its curved arms—above all, with its pointe work—is inherently beautiful to the Western eye. That’s why it’s so popular, and that, plus the popularity, is why some choreographers still regard it with suspicion. They think that watching it is like having ice cream for dinner—that spectators, lulled by its loveliness, will not seek serious nourishment, “meaning.” Or so the crossover choreographers of the eighties and nineties apparently figured, because again and again they made ballet not just the language but the subject of their work. A good example is Tharp’s trailblazing “Deuce Coupe,” in which, amid disorderly gangs of dancers boogying and bopping, a lone ballet dancer, dressed in pure white and positioned at center stage, goes through the ballet lexicon step by step. The subject is ballet’s difference from other forms. Today, by the same logic, crossover choreographers will aggressively contrast ballet with non-ballet—a fabulous arabesque with a grunty squat. It’s an itch; they can’t help it. They have to show that though they’re using ballet, they’re not taken in by it.

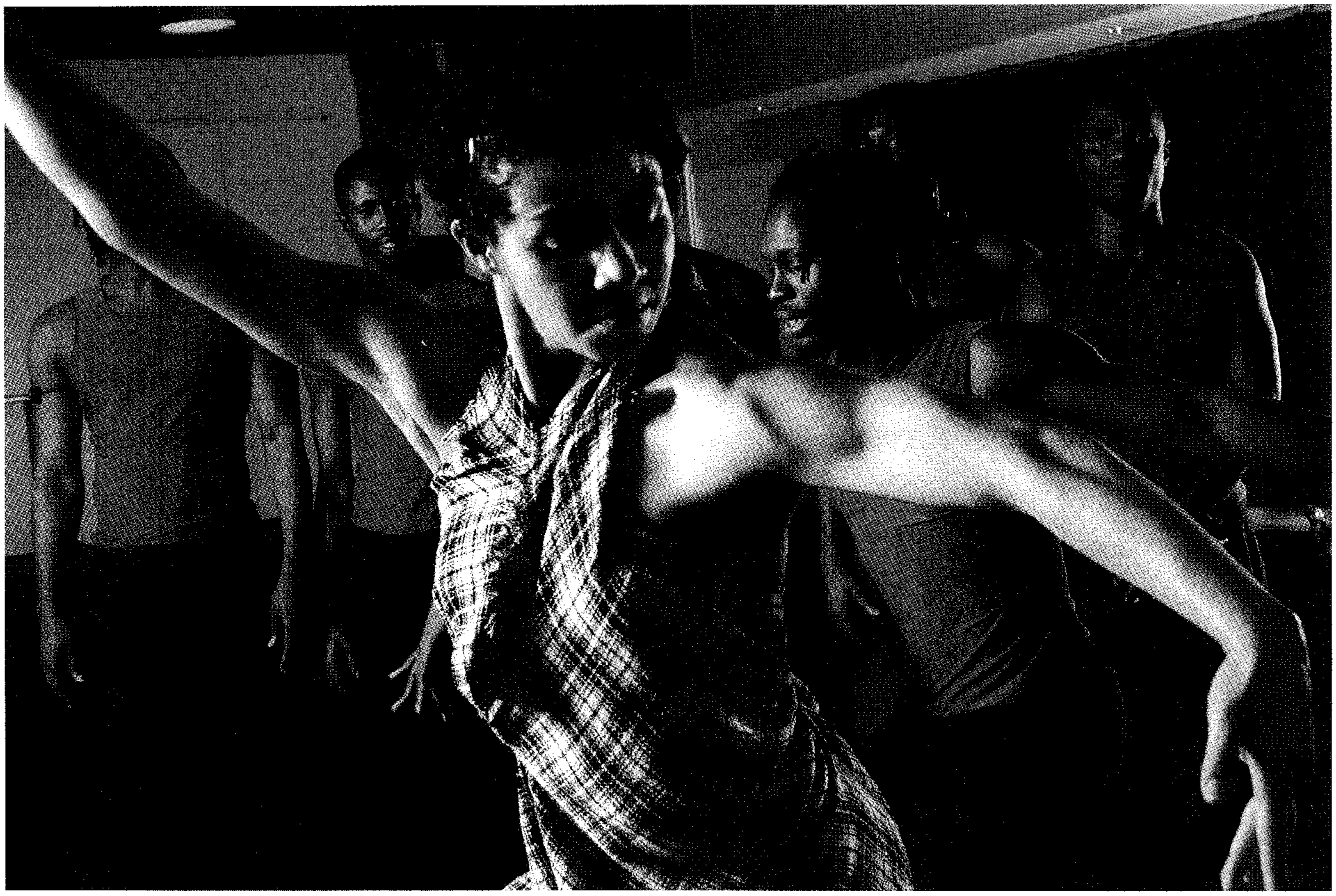
Which brings us to “Amjad,” a ballet, sort of, by Édouard Lock, which was performed by his Montreal company, La La La Human Steps, as part of the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival last month. Lock seems to have had very little ballet training. When I asked him about this, he said that he had studied ballet for a few months at Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, in 1971. (Ballet dancers have normally studied the technique for at least ten years.) According to the BAM program, Lock aims to “create a sense of perceptual distortion and renewal that encourages audiences to both reinvent and rediscover the body and its dance,” and one of his means to that end is “the alteration of balletic structures.” Such alteration was a prominent feature of “Amjad.” (Amjad is an Arabic name—Lock was born in Morocco—that can be given to either a male or a female. I’m not sure what it means as a title: maybe Lock wants to say that both men and women can dance ballet, but, as they have been doing so since the seventeenth century, this is not a discovery.) The piece is a critique of “Swan Lake,” a fact that is announced in the music, a collage of growly, dissonant variations—by Gavin Bryars (mostly), David Lang, and Blake Hargreaves—on Tchaikovsky’s themes for that ballet, plus a little “Sleeping Beauty.” The musical subversion is seconded by the dancing, in which key maneuvers of the choreography that Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov created for “Swan Lake”—pirouettes, passés, and, above all, the wafting swan arms—are repeated again and again and again. Therein lies the problem with Lock’s piece. Duration is supposed to be an interesting property of modern art, but, oh, what a duration this was, an hour and forty minutes of three or four steps, plus endlessly flapping arms. Lock put a spin on his material. For one thing, it was performed at terrific speed, double or maybe triple the tempo of “Swan Lake.” He also ordered some two hundred and fifty lighting changes. No sooner did one dancer, in a circle of light, accomplish those drill-bit pirouettes than she was plunged into darkness, and another woman, in another pool of light, did the same thing. Finally, there was video (by Lock), on screens that kept shooting up and down from the flies. What we saw in the video, for the most part, was white spheres—now like billiard balls, now like breasts, now like pearls. These balls gave Lock his ending, which, with so few steps, he would have been hard put to arrive at choreographically. Suddenly, on the screens, the balls came rocketing toward us as the pianist banged furiously on the piano. An explosion! Then we got to go home.

“Amjad” is an excellent demonstration of how short-breathed iconoclasm is. You take a smack at the thing you scorn, and then you take another smack at it, and then what do you do? Another problem is the temptation of bad faith—of having your cake and eating it, too. In many “deconstructions” of ballet, the one thing that really looks good is the ballet, and that was true of “Amjad.” The members of the audience see this and sit there in confusion. This stuff looks fabulous, they think, so tell us again—why aren’t we supposed to like it?

“Amjad” was followed, at the Next Wave Festival, by “Les Écailles de la Mémoire” (“The Scales of Memory”), a collaboration between an all-female Brooklyn company, Urban Bush

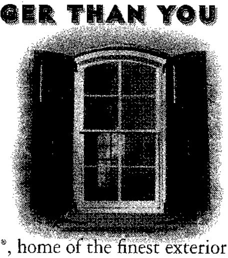
Women, and an all-male Senegalese group, Compagnie Jant-Bi. Urban Bush Women, twenty-four years old, is a modern-dance company with a pronounced African base. Jant-Bi, ten years old, is an African-heritage company with some infiltration of modern dance. Both are emphatically political organizations. Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, the founder-director of Urban Bush Women, calls her troupe a part of the African-diaspora community, seeking to tell the "stories of disenfranchised people." (That includes women as well as African-Americans. In one of the company's older pieces, the dancers, after much pointed discussion of gender, bit into large, warty pickles, with clear meaning.) As for Jant-Bi, its effort to preserve and nourish West African dance cannot but take into account the painful facts of the continent's history. (Last year, the company brought to New York a piece on the Rwandan genocide.) Reportedly, the two troupes met at a conference four years ago and found that they had a lot to talk about. Slavery must have been one of those things, for it is the subject of "Les Écailles." The dancers stood on benches, as at a slave auction; they walked with their hands joined at the back, as if manacled. Most disturbingly, all fourteen dancers appeared, at the opening of the piece, in closed ranks, in near-darkness, way upstage. They looked like a gallery of ghosts.

The piece had no structure that I could work out. According to the advance press, Zollar and Germaine Acogny, the director of Jant-Bi, got the dancers to improvise in the studio and then shaped these improvisations into an evening-length work. That method is used by a number of choreographers—for example, Pina Bausch—and "Les Écailles" looks a little like a Bausch piece; that is, a series of disconnected scenes, like a string of beads. But in "Les Écailles" the stop-and-start rule operated *within* scenes as well. The dancers would do something for a while, until, it seemed, they got tired of it. Then, after standing around for a minute, they would start something else. The music, an original score by Fabrice Bouillon-LaForest (mostly), was the same way.


Members of Urban Bush Women and the Compagnie Jant-Bi in rehearsal. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

But no amount of structural looseness could detract from the dancing that was done in "Les Écailles." African dance, like ballet, is one of the foremost jewels in the crown of art. It could not be more different from ballet. The feet are flat on the floor. The knees are bent, and the buttocks out, so that the pelvis—always the motor of dance, but often (as in ballet) tucked in, hidden—is grandly displayed, and flanked by thighs of steel. On that solid platform an astonishing construction is raised: more jumps and stamps and panty-showing turns, to more rhythms, than you can count. Some people say that African dance moves symbolize higher values: vitality, community. I don't know if the audience thought about those things, but we sat there agape.

Because the form itself is such a thrill, non-experts, watching it, sometimes think that all the people doing it are equally good. I am not an expert, either, but let me say, for the record, that the standouts of "Les Écailles" were Babacar Ba, from Jant-Bi, and Samantha Speis, from Urban Bush Women. ♦



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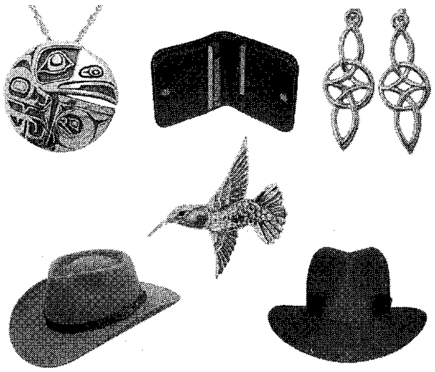

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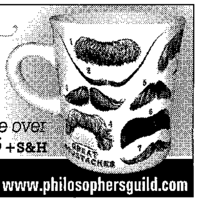

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ON TELEVISION

SKETCHY COMEDY

Tina Fey's "30 Rock."

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

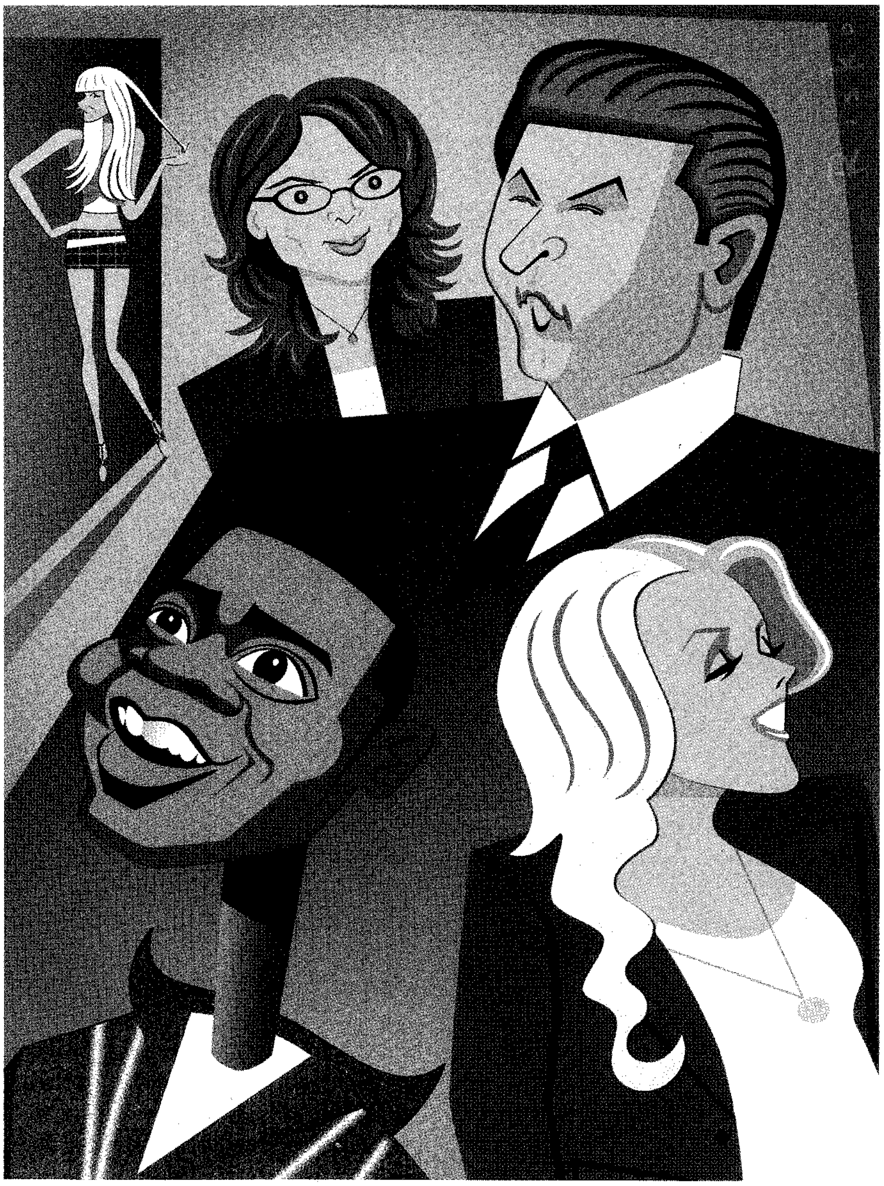
Upon winning the second of three Emmy Awards at this year's ceremonies, in September, Tina Fey, the creator, star, and one of the executive producers and main writers of the sitcom "30 Rock"—and by then YouTubularly famous around the world for her impression of Sarah Palin on "Saturday Night Live"—said, "I want to thank my parents for somehow raising me to have confidence that is disproportionate with my looks and abilities," adding, "Well done—that is what all parents should do." That statement captured a little something of Fey's kind of humor and what one guesses (because one, not knowing her, doesn't know for sure) is a decency and a generosity that served her well when she became the first female head writer at "Saturday Night Live," in 1999, and had to manage a mostly male staff, and that serve her well now, as the top dog of "30 Rock," in case there are any male writers or comedians still out there who find it difficult to work for an assertive woman. And, you know, there just may be some: last week—and this is 2008, mind you—the *Wall Street Journal* ran an article titled "Ways Women Can Hold Their Own in a Male World," which began, "Joining a male-dominated industry, like engineering, computer science or construction trades, can be intimidating."

As Liz Lemon, who's in charge of the writers of a "Saturday Night Live"-like show-within-a-show, Fey is the central character of "30 Rock," running around the office—often literally, in the way that female sitcom characters are prone to do—fielding complaints from the writers and directives and sexist remarks from her boss at the network, Jack Donaghy (His Awesome Majesty Alec Baldwin, the King of Comedy), and dealing with wacko behavior from the unhinged star of the show, Tracy Jordan (Tracy Morgan). Liz is in her late thirties and single, and occasionally a plot thread having to do with her personal life is woven into the show; a recent trope is her desire to have a baby, a desire that is tinged with desperation, thanks to Donaghy's warnings about her "Big Ben-sized biological clock."

Fey has surrounded herself with a cast that has one spectacular member and a couple of really good ones, but that averages out to only fair. Her own performance falls into the not-so-great category. It may be that in her effort to keep the show from being a star vehicle—such things have a tendency to crash—she is too generous; although she's onscreen a lot and is game to do anything for a laugh, I sense that part of her is keeping her distance from the fray. Jerry Seinfeld appeared to do the same thing on his show—make way for his fellow-performers—but then I found him cold, too. Fey's intelligence comes across, of course, but it's a kind of managerial intelligence, a high level of competence. That sort of no-nonsense—or very-little-nonsense—approach was appropriate for Fey's onscreen role on "Saturday Night Live," as co-anchor of the fake-news segment "Weekend Update." In that part, she was meant to be the smart professional—the grownup, who could give smooth handoffs to her nutty co-anchor, the giddily anarchic Amy Poehler, or, before that, the comic nonentity Jimmy Fallon (who will inexplicably take over the plum Conan O'Brien spot on NBC when O'Brien prematurely takes over the "Tonight Show" from Jay Leno next year). It was refreshing to see a woman on "Weekend Update"—when Fey started, there hadn't been a female anchor since Jane Curtin did it for a few seasons in the late seventies—and, as a bonus, Fey was better at it than her two immediate predecessors, Norm MacDonald and Colin Quinn. She was not afraid to have an edge or to skewer public figures, but something beyond that is required of the main character of a sitcom.

Liz Lemon is obviously inspired by Fey's nine-season career at "S.N.L." (and, as if the in-joke needed more underscoring, Liz's fictional show is on NBC, as is "30 Rock" itself, and "S.N.L."). "30 Rock" doesn't have the neat structure of most sitcoms; its roots are in sketch comedy and in improv, with their set pieces and their eagerness to keep you entertained every second without worrying too much about the story. So it moves at a pretty good clip and is full of zingers, but in the first season I found myself fast-forwarding through many of the scenes that didn't involve Alec Baldwin or Jack McBrayer, who plays Kenneth, an NBC page and a true original, a cheery Southern goofball with a tendency to grin at the wrong things, whose ethical streak both confounds and inspires the show-biz jadeds around him. As for the writers, they are mostly your basic slobs and social misfits. Tracy Morgan's Tracy Jordan is a movie star, well known for being unstable, who was foisted on Liz by Donaghy in the show's first episode; I find him irritating and hard to watch, and I guess I'm meant to, in order to know what it would feel like to have my show, my baby, messed with by the corporate types.

The show's true claim to fame, and a reason never to miss an episode, is Alec Baldwin, whose comic magnetism is so strong I'm surprised it hasn't caused weather disturbances. He doesn't steal scenes; he makes them rise and shine. Baldwin has to know how good he is, but he wears it lightly, and you actually take pleasure from how much pleasure you're taking from his performance—just as you do, say, when Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby sing that put-'er-there-pal number "Well, Did You Evah?," in "High Society." They know that we know who they are, and Baldwin knows that we know who he is. And yet he plays well with others, and allows the star of the show to be the relationship between him and Liz. (He also gets out of the way when guest stars turn up on the show. Oprah Winfrey was in a recent episode—if you didn't see the actual show, you surely saw the endless promos—and she and Baldwin didn't even have any scenes together.) Jack is part corporate jackass (he tells Liz that Jack Welch is "the greatest leader since the Pharaohs," and says things like "We're effectively synergizing backward overflow"), part self-infatuated charmer, and part oblivious big baby, yet the friction between him and Liz develops into friendship. They're buddies, and look out for each other, he trying to help her bump her personal life up a notch, and she covering for his boyish cluelessness about his own life. There's an attraction between Jack and Liz that must stem, in part, from Fey's and Baldwin's appreciation of each other offscreen. Fey wrote the part of Jack for Baldwin, in the Hail Mary-pass hope that he would take it, and in interviews about "30 Rock" Baldwin never fails to mention her writing. (She also wrote the part of Kenneth specifically for Jack McBrayer.) It's a great office romance, without sex to ruin it. Fey's Liz has become a bit looser over the show's forty episodes, and it may be that winning two Emmys in a row for Best Actress in a Comedy has freed Fey up as a performer; in which case, I'm all for giving out awards before people fully deserve them. (Yoo-hoo, Pulitzer Prize committee, over here!) The show's ratings have never been great, though, and it's now in danger of unseemly guest-star overload. Already, in the first four episodes of the new season, Megan Mullally, Oprah, Jennifer Aniston, some of the cast of "Night Court," and Steve Martin have trooped through. Whatever happens to the show, Liz and Jack have made a lasting impression. As the song goes, when other friendships have been forgot, theirs will still be hot. ♦



Comedy collective: a sitcom à clef from a "Saturday Night Live" alum.

ROBERT RISKO

NEWYORKER.COM

Nancy Franklin answers readers' questions.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

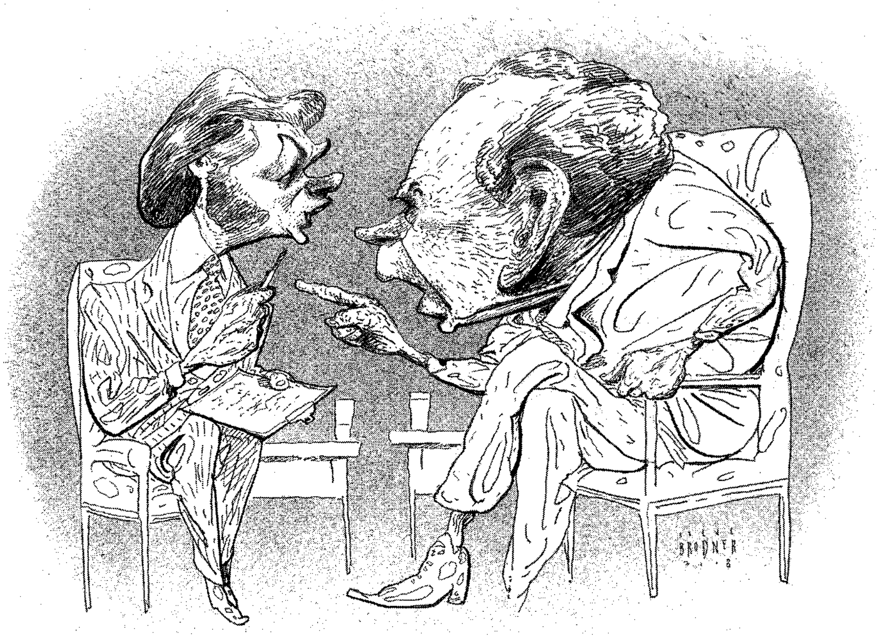
HISTORY IN THE MAKING

"Frost/Nixon" and "Australia."

BY DAVID DENBY

In 1969, just after Richard Nixon was elected President, he gave a press conference in which he addressed the question of Soviet-American relations. His remarks were an entirely cogent and candid summing up of the state of affairs, and, among the cadre of Nixon haters, of whom, even though young, I was a veteran, the shock was considerable. Some of us had made the mistake of not noticing that Nixon was extremely intelligent. Later on, of course, during the Watergate crisis, Nixon's brilliance was overcome by pathologies of various kinds. One of the virtues of "Frost/Nixon," Ron Howard's adaptation of Peter Morgan's hit play, is that it brings the intelligence back to the forefront without dispelling the elements of menace and fraudulence that were also part of Nixon's temperament. The movie re-creates the circumstances around the famous set of televised interviews that the British talk-show entrepreneur David Frost conducted with Nixon in 1977, three years after he resigned the Presidency. Howard and Morgan have opened up the play to the big-media world of airports, hotels, limos, and anxious telephone calls, but the center of the material is still the interviews themselves, and what each man hoped to gain from them: Nixon (Frank Langella) wanted fresh access to the stage as a statesman; Frost (Michael Sheen), whose career was in decline, wanted a chance to be taken seriously as a journalist. The interviews turn into a duel: Will Frost get Nixon to break his iron habits of denial? Or will Nixon face down Frost and escape public judgment, cheating the American people yet again of an apology, a confession of sin?

During the preparations and the negotiations, we quickly take the measure of Frost—an affable, chipper, smart, but rather shallow showman with plenty of hustle and daring. But Nixon keeps changing; we never do completely understand him. Langella has mastered the rumbling voice with its occasional touch of animal growl. He leans forward as he walks, almost apelike as his arms hang down; he gets Nixon's heaviness of bearing, the awkwardness, the grotesque sentimentality, and also his power, the dangerousness even in retreat. This man notices many things, including any eccentricity of dress, any hint of weakness in his opponent, and he's cagey about offering signs of friendliness—an anecdote, a bit of personal advice—that would make Frost falter. Protected and coached by the fierce ex-marine Jack Brennan (Kevin Bacon), Nixon dominates the early interviews, talking at length, cutting off tough questions. But then, after unleashing the journalist James Reston, Jr. (Sam Rockwell), who finds evidence that Nixon knew of the Watergate coverup well before he claimed, Frost sees his chance for victory and gets to work.



Michael Sheen and Frank Langella in Ron Howard's movie.

STEVE BRODNER

"Frost/Nixon" offers considerable insight into the Nixon mystery, without solving it; the movie is fully absorbing and even, when Nixon falls into a drunken, resentful rage, exciting, but I can't escape the feeling that it carries about it an aura of momentousness that isn't warranted by the events. Why is it meant to be so important to us whether David Frost revives his career? Frost and Reston did finally goad Nixon into saying that he let the American people down, and that he believed that "when the President does it, that means it's not illegal," and they have extracted a considerable amount of copy out of the broadcasts (including two books). But it's possible that both journalists and playwright have confused a media coup (and a less important one than that of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein) with a cleansing act that forever chastened the Presidency. It was anything but that: after all, twenty-four years later, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney entered the White House.

A good part of Baz Luhrmann's excruciating national epic, "Australia," is set on an enormous cattle station, Faraway Downs, in the Northern Territory. The landscape is vast and flat, with distant, red rock monoliths rising out of the desert. Silence and a steady camera, I think, could have produced in moviegoers an awe comparable to that which David Lean evoked with "Lawrence of Arabia." But Luhrmann imposes his own restlessness on the unyielding terrain. In his previous movie, "Moulin Rouge!," his inability to stage anything clearly was disguised by spasmodic camera movements and abrupt cutting; the fragments were glued together to form a bumpy continuity of sorts. But in "Australia," when not much is going on in the big open spaces, Luhrmann is lost. His camera sweeps along the ground as if searching for something, or, more frequently, it rises rapidly into the air while gazing downward—the receding ground might have been photographed from the space shuttle as it took off. But once Luhrmann is up in the air, where can he go? He can only cut to the ground again. He has created an instant cliché: the rise to nowhere. In such moments, you can feel the director's frustration; he's like an infant wrestling with a king-size mattress. It's a shame that Fox entrusted Luhrmann with this project, because audiences were probably ready for a big-boned realistic movie spectacle. We couldn't rightly expect Lean's stern pictorial glory, or the vital dramatic imagination of a Fred Zinnemann ("From Here to Eternity"). But, at this point, we would have gladly settled for the routine competence of a George Roy Hill, whose national epic "Hawaii" (1966), put up against "Australia," is a model of narrative rectitude.

Luhrmann is drawn to kitsch as inevitably as a bear to honey. The early scenes of this movie have a ludicrous opéra-bouffe boisterousness. Nicole Kidman is Sarah Ashley, a rich, highborn Englishwoman with clipped diction and jackets that fit as tightly as a toreador's. It's 1939, and she arrives in a huff from England to retrieve her husband, who she suspects has been dallying with Aboriginal women on the family-owned cattle station. In Darwin, she looks for her lift to the interior, in the person of a cattle driver known as the Drover (Hugh Jackman), and finds him engaged in a meaningless bar brawl. (As if Australia weren't raw enough, Luhrmann is given to scenes of roistering and tumult.) Of course, the two take an immediate dislike to each other, and, of course, we know exactly what will happen: he will bring out the passionate woman beneath the starched riding clothes (which she wears in the desert heat); she's going to bring out the responsible and caring man within the nihilistic free spirit. We're quickly treated to such delicate moments as a conversation, during their drive across the desert, in which he's talking about mating two horses, and she thinks he's propositioning her, and a scene in which she gapes at his naked torso as they make camp for the night. Meanwhile, a neighboring cattle baron (Bryan Brown) is trying to destroy Faraway Downs so that he can buy it on the cheap. He has an evil fellow (David Wenham) working for him who has a disconcerting habit of stealthily approaching people and whispering threats into their ears. Here and there, Kidman has an enchanting scene, such as when she tries to sing "Over the Rainbow" to Nullah (Brandon Walters), a half-caste boy who lives at Faraway Downs, but can't remember the tune or the lyrics, and makes them up as she goes along. As for Jackman, he has adapted the Victor Mature approach to pectoral mass, but his temperamental range is undeveloped. Mostly, he seems like a quiet man who would prefer to be excused from all the overwrought goings on.

Luhrmann wants to create huge, throbbing set pieces, but he never establishes an adequate ground of normal reality from which those pieces would be an exultant relief. The movie is all bitter partings and joyous reunions and nasty Japanese dive-bombers who fly in and mess up everything. None of the big moments look quite right—for example, the cattle drive in which the animals are stampeded to the edge of a precipice is obviously a digital fake. The movie joins a 1939 plot to contemporary technology—old Hollywood cheesiness meets new Hollywood cheesiness. In the midst of the spectacle, however, Luhrmann and his screenwriters, Stuart Beattie, Ronald Harwood, and Richard Flanagan, have attempted to denounce racism (Nullah is despised by the whites) and then to trace the beginnings of white respect for Aboriginal culture. Nullah's grandfather, a shaman known as King George (David Gulpilil), is a major figure in the movie—well, in a way. Whenever the story gets stuck, he suddenly appears, in a loincloth, perched atop a peak, or perhaps a water tower—in any case, he's up high. He then performs whatever magic is necessary to move the film along. At the end, King George summons Nullah to a rite of passage, a walkabout. Nullah's disappearance into the desert, leaving the whites behind, is framed as a triumphant anti-colonial moment, but Luhrmann confuses the issue by accompanying the scene with, of all things, the stirring "Nimrod" passage from "Enigma Variations," by Edward Elgar, the composer perhaps most closely associated with the glories of empire. With the same degree of appropriateness, Luhrmann might celebrate Barack Obama's Inauguration with a thundering rendition of "Dixie." ♦

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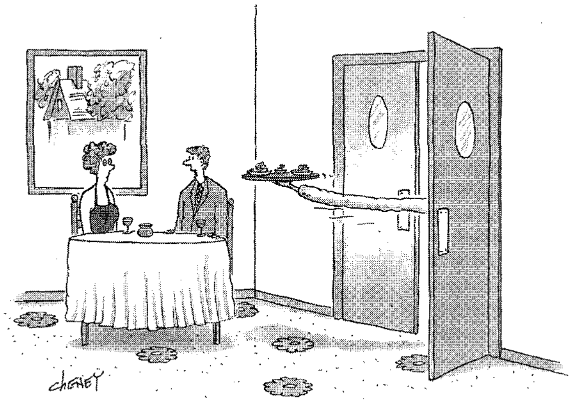
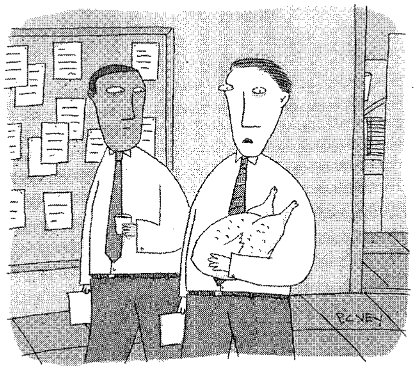
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Lee Lorenz, must be received by Sunday, December 7th. Finalists in the November 24th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 22nd & 29th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Please try not to stare at his disproportionately short right arm."
Chas Kikel, Cleveland Heights, Ohio



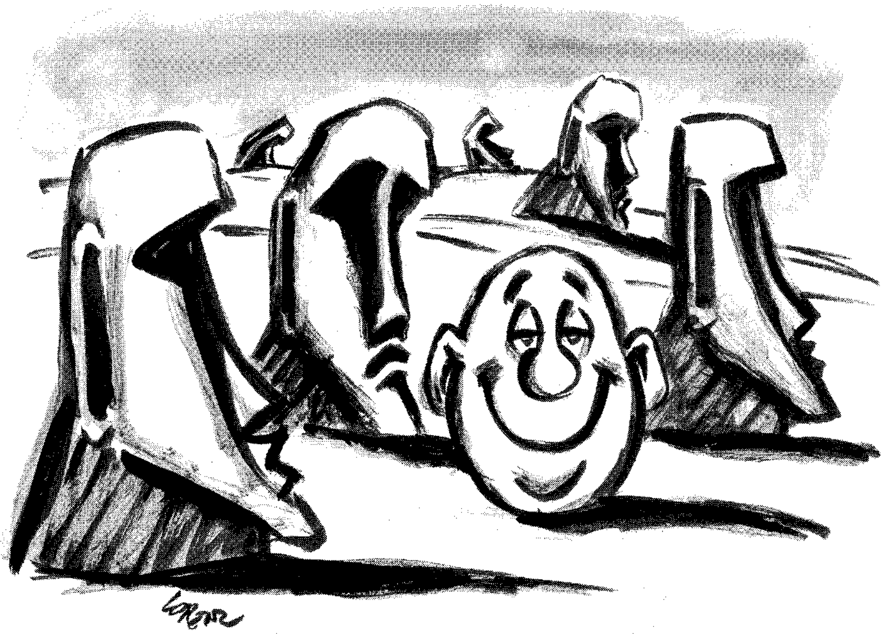
THE FINALISTS

"I am useless until I have my morning turkey."
Corey Lowney, Wappingers Falls, N.Y.

"I was actually hoping for a boy."
Antonia Boyette, Los Angeles, Calif.

"I miss the cash bonuses."
Robert Becker, Northford, Conn.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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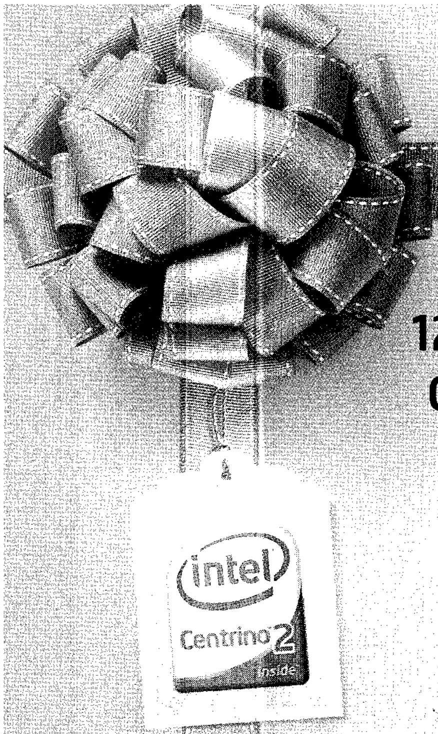

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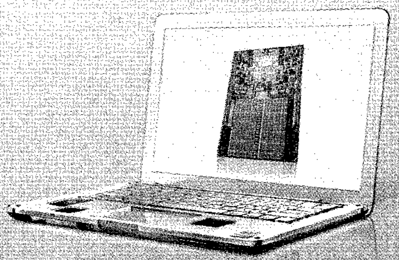

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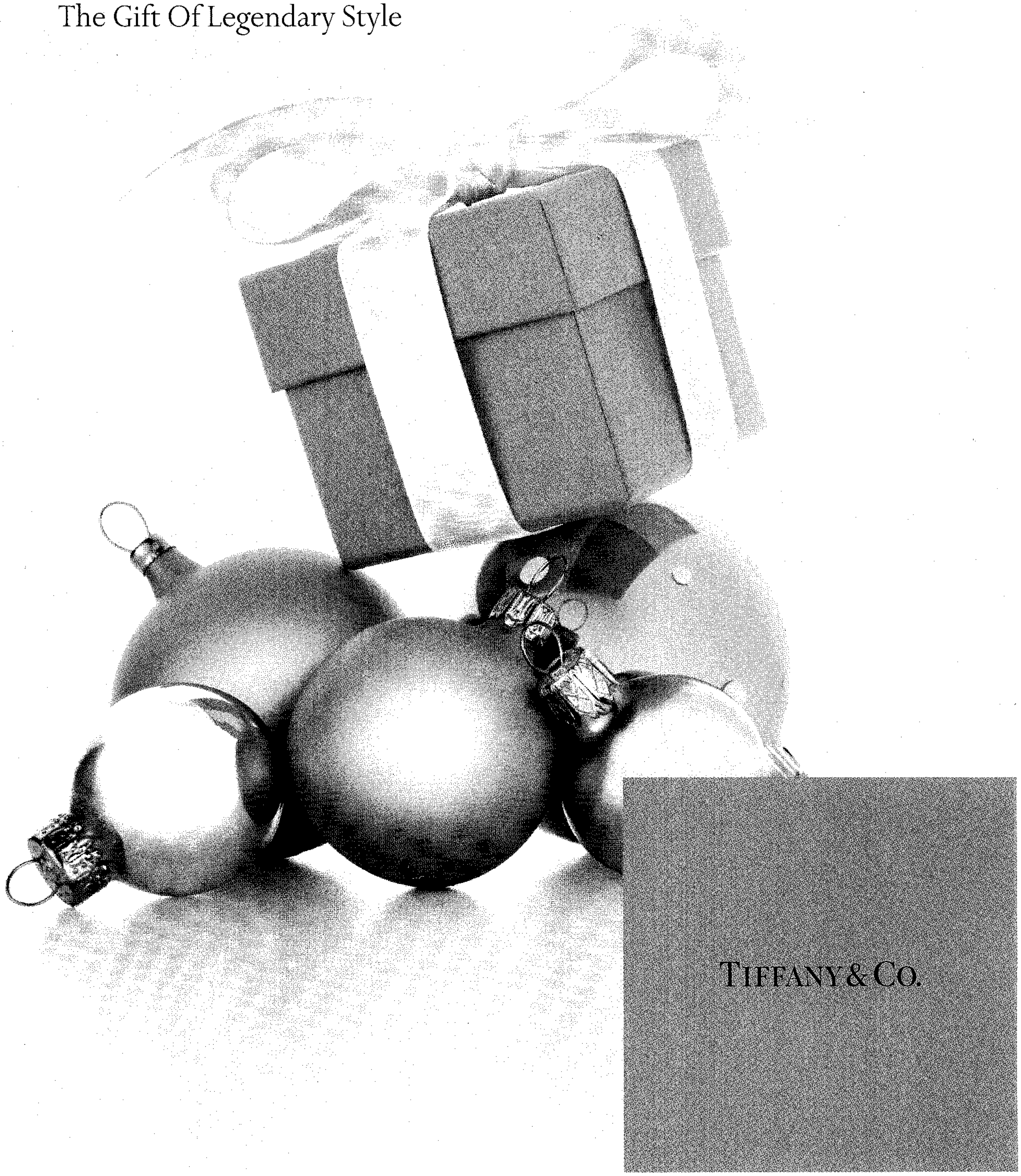

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